

2010

# Lulling

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## Recommended Citation

Leader, Mary. "Lulling." *The Iowa Review* 40.1 (2010): 18-19. Web.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6834>

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## LULLING

*for two voices*

“They’re just not holding out any hope at all now.”  
They’d stopped even the IV. By the time I got there,  
My mother was so dehydrated, she couldn’t  
Cry. It had been snowing all day, not that the blinds  
Had been opened. Too dehydrated to cry,  
But when they moved her, she sobbed.

By 10 p.m., my brothers and their wives and kids,  
Our last uncle and all our aunts had cleared out.  
Neal went to the lobby to read. Her room was dim,  
Now, thankfully, after a forty-five minute ordeal  
In the brightest possible glare, three nurses  
Taking increasingly anxious turns trying to restore

A slipped Heparin lock to my mother’s elusive vein.  
Finally! One of the nurses, relieved, telling her  
“I’m gonna tape that down real good now,  
So’s you don’t have to go through that again.”  
Too dehydrated to swallow, Mother nodded,  
Nodded as she had to me earlier, when I said

“I love you.” Too dehydrated to say hardly anything,  
She groaned “I love—uhhn—you too—uhhn. Uhhhn.”  
“She likes you to stroke her forehead,” Neal had said.  
Neal gone out to the lobby, the rest gone home,  
The white sheets, the minutes into the morphine,  
And me in the den-like gloom, preparing to settle.

She sobbed  
All now  
To cry  
Got there  
The blinds  
She couldn’t

To restore  
And kids  
Three nurses  
Cleared out  
Minute ordeal  
Was dim

I said  
Elusive vein  
Mother nodded  
Telling her  
That again  
Good now

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I went over to my bag for my book and my shawl.      To settle  
But first I needed to get a good look at her, and so      Hardly anything  
She opened her eyes. And just fractionally,      The morphine  
Turned her face toward me. She watched      Uhhn. Uhhn  
My hand as it went to stroke her forehead. I knew      Gone home  
Myself to be shadowy because she followed      Had said

The alien hand with her flattened eyes      She followed  
As an infant at night follows a mobile's shadows      My shawl  
In the light from the hall. Of the song she sang me      I knew  
When I was small, I remembered mainly      And so  
The tune: hmm hm-m swe-et Afton la da dah, da dum      She watched  
Hm hm hmm.... Hm hm hmm, flo-w-gently....      Just fractionally

Her forehead so dry and stretched with pain,      Just fractionally she followed  
I stroked, and hummed and hummed, past the time      She watched my shawl  
When one of her long, long breaths did not return.      And so I knew