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The Giraffe

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When the midnight phone rang, my friend’s voice kept trying to say the word hysterectomy, that one-word melody with ancestors stalking the madhouses of nineteenth century England. I was, of course, moved, more by the simple failure of elocution than the illness—which was a factoid in a slick magazine. Like learning that a giraffe has seven neck bones, that a bat will eat a ton of mosquitos in an average year. Hysterectomy.

Abstract as a memo from the President of Nocturnal Congestion. The dishes shifted in their dishwasher nest. The refrigerator hummed its cryogenic folksongs. The budgerigar honked and chittered in its night-shrouded cage. I twirled the phone cord around my finger like a man twirling a phone cord around his finger. The voice in the telephone. The voice in the telephone. I kept hearing appendectomy, lobotomy, laparoscopy.

The sadness soaking into the words like hand creme. The words thick with it, bloated. Seven neck bones. Imagine. Like you. Like me. But the miraculous reach.