**The Hospitalist**

Annie Albright

hospital from the latin *hospes*

from the proto-indo-european word *ghos-ti*

which became host (*hoste)*

but also guest (*gest)*

and also ghost (*gost)*

and where could those things be the same except in the hospital

with the foreigner in that crepe-paper dress

who fevers breaks tumbles shakes writhes spews

bodily fluids and curses and homeward light

like a star that doesn’t know which way is north or south

only knows the magnetic force of dying slowly

dying brightly

I guess that’s how it is when you have a billion years

not them not these guests not these hosts nor these ghosts

a lifetime at most

a lifetime spent in the place where stars are born and die

the big bang and end-of-times all in one place

where the young can be old and the old can be new

and the odds are tenuous at best

and yet

strangers drive one hundred miles an hour down roads

that were built by blasting through mountains a million years old

cradling dinosaur bones a million years old

on roads where coming and going are separated

by the faintest of yellow lines

our bodies were never meant to go that fast

our brains are too loose in our skulls

our hearts are too free in our jagged chests

and even when that cage is broken they continue

they push

and they rush

away from guest away from host

towards broken bread

and lighted hearth

and ghosts

and ghosts

and ghosts