Stitching Mr. Lasseter

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Poetry in the names: suture, stitch, the needle driver has drive, the throw of a stitch, how it can be interrupted, or one long song pulling the edges ever closer until they nestle, and the unwound wound, once agape, telling no more secrets.

Big gash, drunk forehead: a smiley smile, a goofy grin. The old man fell, and he smiles as he tells me a song, something about bedroom slippers and a trip. The paramedics picked him up outside a bar.

I draw up the percent xylocaine from the red bottle, my 20-guage sucking it up, switch to 25-guage and spread goodwill around: swell the smile to a big Jagger pucker and grab the needle driver, the suture, and say: you’re frozen, thinking of lips kissing a post in winter. I want to grab his second mouth and make high-pitched funny noises, but the nurses would talk again about Dr. Neilson so I grab the vicryl suture with the driver and begin: bite in, bite out, throw a knot, double, triple, cut. I’m sewing up a Dali face as I wonder what this mouth would really say, given the chance. I’m leaning close enough to hear the pop of needle tip piercing tough tanned tissue, and I wonder too about the interrupted technique, about how I’m not giving this mouth a say, how my deep bites tie its tongue, how the upper and lower flaps have come together nicely, how his life will never, about the beauty of the word evert and as I bid goodbye to wobbly Mr. Lasseter of the slippered fall I wonder why ERs aren’t like the hair salon, equipped with hand mirrors so that patients can see. Seven days, I bid him, the stitches need to come out, and the pursed-lips will become a scar, yellow skin whitening and tightening, condemned to the ghost of a smile.

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