

Night Nurse

Sarah Hannah

Don't talk to me of Paris;
I have duties.
Don't talk to me of loss;
I bury pills in applesauce.

Come dusk, I'm in;
I draw the shade, the velvet cloak,
The dark antique brocade
You bought on sale.

It tells tales—tall, elaborate—
Of fates and tulips, groves,
Garden gates. You look at me
And know it's late;

It's almost time. But for this turn
The hour's ours: nocturne, tantrum,
Morphine sulfate,
Pudding, needle, nightie.

The other shift is tidy.
The one by day, in white,
Is a woman full of god,
Her hair in cloth and curlers.

Such effort signals optimism.
She hand washes your dresses to dry
In the sun. She sings, scrubs, reads scripture.
She never curses, not even when you hit her.

Night's your scourge, your lackey.
I can't be fired or expelled. Rather,
I can be fired many times and still
Reappear each twilight, ring your bell

At seven. And you look at me with dread;
You look at me with spite and think of ebbing,
The fugitive and late-to-bloom,
The hoary loom above the bed.

Put it away with the dust pan and broom
In the smeared closet.
Deny me, all my implements—
This bed of sharps, this offspring,

This chamber pot and sickroom—
Forget us, every one,
And slide the morning in
Like a fresh dose, a clean spoon.

