

The Nightwatchman

Lynn Valentine

I worked night-shift as a child,
guided my sister back to bed.
I slept lightly, always on the job,
scared to sleep in case I missed her toy owl's
floor thump, the soft sigh of springs
as Diane raised herself like Lazarus,
rolled forward into the night, feet
feathering the floor. I watched her
blank stare fix upon the midnight window.
My whisper sliced the air,
Diane come back to me.

Some nights she'd head for the stairs,
nightdress trailing like angel's wings.
I'd guide her from her flight, lead her
past the sharp contours of the cabinet
that perched in the hall, corners
primed to catch a too-fast child
or those that did not care if cut.
Diane come back to your bed.

As an adult I slept soundly,
work over, sister in another town.
Too far away when others saved her
with a blue light's flash in the black.
There will be future nights
when she turns to the dark,
when sleep-walking will seem
like a good idea. I will my thoughts
southwards, tack my heart to her door.
Night-shift begins again,
sister I'm here.