Naked feet
flop over the edge of the mattress
in Quiet Room #4.

The silence is a dead creature
stirring decay into the air conditioning
disguised by water dripping from a tap
a roll of toilet paper unbalancing from the toilet rim
scuttling across the floor,
noises swarming like flies over a carcass.

The observation camera blinks
at the flower of blood wilting on the ground
puckered as an old woman's lips,
the signature of a nurse stealing life
through a hole in the patient's arm.

Her dreams unfold now, in the air:
knives licking doctors' throats
dynamite to fragment the brick walls:
the cold barrels, their fear!
Mirrored back into her eyes.

The observation camera swivels its attention
to the next patient:
his screaming.

By Evelyn Lau