

## V A&E

...in *Sinfin*. Someone's answering the phone says Jenny on reception, calm as snowfall, talking to three people all at once. *Can you wiggle that for me?* In A&E the women all apologise: the men feel foolish. Everyone explains. His ladder with a bucket on the top, my bus stop with its icy puddle. And the bicycles, the endless bicycles; the ones that braked or broke a bone and fell like wobbling coins. *Did you lose consciousness at all?* No, worse: I lost my grip. This is my wake-up call, to break the bones of every hour for marrow. Today, I can be anything I want.

## VI Air

Today, I can be anything I want, the therapist explains. She means well. Well, she means that I should visualise a stone, a candle flame; a space as still as mirrors.

But ART! I'm breathless, heltering and dizzy by the stairwell plinth. This marble clench, this bone-warm bulge as natural as eggs.

Oh, I must raze the waiting rooms and grub up tiles in all the corridors and plant a hedgerow bright with beetles, finched and brambled, tousling around the wards.

My mind's a wren mid-hop; there's hawks on every handrail, tadpoles swelling in the taps. There's birdsong even here, if you've an ear for it.

## VII Traffic

There's birdsong even here. If you've an ear for it, you might distinguish warbler from wren between the song of car door, keyfob bip and Lesser Spotted Handbrake. But then

you're in no mood for birdwatching today. The cars manoeuvre round you, ballet-slow emptying and occupying bays. The shuttle buses shuttle in, and go.

You're here to see someone, or hear the news; your eyes and ears are closed. The hour drags on but it will pass like traffic; like a bruise. Even the greyest days are flecked with song.

Best listen, if they're singing anyway. There behind this, waiting, is another day.

# WAITING



## SEVEN POEMS FOR THE ROYAL DERBY HOSPITAL

BY JO BELL

Illustrations by Diana Shepherd

A special edition of

**POETRY**  
in the  
**WAITING ROOM**

As part of Writing East Midlands' Write Here programme of residencies throughout 2010, Jo Bell spent a number of days at the Royal Derby Hospital. From that experience she has written this corona or crown of seven poems, called *Waiting*.

*"The last line of poem one is the first line of poem two, and so on. The last poem closes the circle, finishing with the first line of the whole sequence. The pieces are set in seven different locations around the hospital site. From my time at the hospital I observed that waiting is often central to the hospital experience: waiting for an ambulance, waiting for the phone to be answered, waiting for an appointment or for results.*

*Each poem is in a different voice – often a patient or visitor, sometimes an unknown observer. The names used are not those of anyone I met during my visits to the hospital. The stories told are composites with identifying details changed to preserve confidentiality, whilst remaining true to the subject matter, but not to the experience of any particular person."*

Jo is a poet and Director of National Poetry Day. For more go to [www.bell-jar.co.uk](http://www.bell-jar.co.uk)

Diana Shepherd

Di is an East Midlands artist and co-founder of visual arts organisation Artblock. She is currently Artist in Residence at England's first public park The Arboretum in Normanton, Derby.

You can see more of Di's work at the Kings Treatment Centre, Royal Derby Hospital, opposite the Hand Clinic.

For more information go to [www.artblock.org.uk](http://www.artblock.org.uk)  
Di also has a facebook page called 'DRAW'



Help air arts to create uplifting moments at Derby Hospitals. If you are a supporter of the arts, an artist, collective or organisation who would like to aid future editions of Poetry in the Waiting Room at Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust please get in touch with the Arts Coordinator on [cooper@hcp.co.uk](mailto:cooper@hcp.co.uk) or 01332 786203

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## I      **Waiting**

They're behind. This waiting – it's another day  
on wipe-clean chairs for me. A bit of peace.

Of course, Mim nagged me. *Take them back*, she said,  
*you paid a bomb*. But there was nothing wrong –  
not with the specs, at least. So off I go  
for tests. The clock was blurry round the edge;  
no wonder. On the scan the optic nerve  
was draped across the tumour like a cloth.  
A walnut of a thing, and me its shell.

This doctor wants a gong, if you ask me –  
he's quiet, like, but told me what was what.  
I'm on the waiting list. And all that from  
an eye test and a bolshy wife. We'll see  
whether it comes or goes. At least we'll know.

## II      **Smokers**

Weather. It comes or goes. At least we'll know  
if Tomasz Shafernaker got it right  
when he predicted thunderstorms  
but Caz, in her pyjamas, doesn't care.  
Come rain or shine, come hot or cold, she's here  
with us three times an hour, to breathe it in  
and light a fag. She doesn't give a damn  
for drizzle or for rainbows: all she knows  
is that she's out, and in it. The lobby doors  
are glassy landmarks in a day of corridors  
and we're the stubborn smokers; villagers  
who gather at the moat in dressing-gowns  
with sodden slippers and waterproof jokes  
to celebrate our days with tiny fires.

*commended in the 2011 Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine*

## III      **At Home**

We celebrate our days with tiny fires.  
Six candles on the cake this time. Six months  
since Azhar, hauling deep for air as if  
it were the last drop in the well, tightened  
to a muscled knot. My fish-bright son, arching  
and sheeny in the paramedic's arms.

That night, blue lights burst round the ambulance  
like broken promises; a breathless snatch  
of screen and railing, steel and sterile pad.  
Today, six candy-stripes of steady flame.

Beyond him as he blows I see the park,  
its half-grown birches small and bright as candles.  
Further still, our hospital: moonlit, wakeful,  
the helicopters settling on the roof.

*Azhar – a boy's name meaning shining, luminous*

## IV      **Delivered**

The helicopter's settling on the roof,  
unsettling and waspish. Someone's been  
unravelling from a twisted motorbike,  
found in a rush-hour twitch of chromosome  
or broken off from shopping; making love  
or coffee. Morning roads in Belper stall, and  
start again. Up in the restaurant,  
an urgent shiver in the ceiling tiles:  
a shift of likelihoods, as if the walls  
might part to show a burlesque club or bunker.  
The hospital throws out its hand to catch  
another morning of surprise and gasp,  
another happenstance delivered. And  
in Sinfin, someone's answering the phone.

