

# The Cooler

by Philip F. Clark

We stop laughing when the doctors come in.  
Don't want to scare them.  
Ben (car accident, Christmas, gifts all over the road),  
tries to freak them out though. He'll make a low sound  
sometimes. One nurse ran so fast she almost went  
out the window. Sheryl her name was.

Me (smiling, at work, just as I finished signing a contract), I like to  
play dead. Because that's what I am right?  
Evan (his brother got angry one night, forgot he had a knife in his  
hand) doesn't like the dark. We hear him crying sometimes.  
You get used to the sliding in and out; the murmurs.

Biggest fear: we are mis-identified. Happened to Joe (air conditioner  
from 100 feet up) once. Almost Pottered him,  
but his sister came by just in time. No wallet, nothin on him.  
She identified a tattoo of a rose on his ass.  
They say it's easier now -- 'at peace' -- and all that shit.

But it's not. It's harder. Because we still  
see everything going on that we can't do. We see you  
but can't kiss you; see the kids or the husband,  
the boyfriend, but we can't touch you -- I mean,  
we do, but you know. They don't feel anything.  
But then, we don't feel anything too.  
I'm waiting; haven't been here long. A day or two?  
Not sure who'll come. This is called passing time.

At night it's different. You think it wouldn't be --  
us in these locked boxes. But it is. Because then  
we really are quiet. I think a lot: what if I hadn't gone  
to work that day? But I did.

You can smell the stars at night. Yes, the stars.  
They smell like something we miss, or forgot to do.

There goes Ben. Well, I'll miss him. Long road  
home for him. He was visiting his former lover  
in New Hope. New Hope, how funny is that.

