

Sensing Spirits

Linda Sillitoe

We had to fly to her brother's wedding.
But she lay prone on a heating pad,
the room spinning above, and her
weight and blood pressure each
below one hundred. I prepared to carve
her pink bridesmaid's dress to fit,
then sew it smooth and smaller.

I hoped music from a native flute might ease
the unforgiving fabric and erase
my fear of a misshapen dress walking
her down the aisle—if she *could* walk.
One seam sewn, I took a breath
and went to check the patient.
I'm fine, she chirped, *don't worry*.

Pilgrim is here, circled on my chest.
Aunt Fern is helping you fix my dress.
I gasped and said, *that's good*. Fern died
when I was twelve. This daughter ate
my memories more than food, which turned
her inside out. Pilgrim, her feline nursemaid,
had been put to sleep. And our new cat,

young and lionesque, skirted the sickroom.
That day, the tension I tried to hide haloed
me like burrs, too thick for sensing spirits.
But I was glad for her—unless it meant. . . .
Oh, let me edit that aching day with vision:
not homecoming, her knees sharp through denim
as a wheelchair bore her through the airport;

not the months and pounds and pressure points
yet to fall like long brown hair before her bones
finally turned on a solid diagnosis. Let me glimpse
her kicking off white shoes—as she did—to dance
with her new nephew, so suave in his small tux.
Let me know I'll pump the camera to invest
her macerena whirl against whatever comes.