

Name: _____ Class: _____

Mercy

By Teri Ellen Cross Davis
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Teri Ellen Cross Davis is an American poet based in the D.C. metropolitan area, who holds an MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry, from American University. Her work often focuses on Washington, D.C., childhood, and her life experiences as a woman of color. As you read, takes notes on the imagery the poet uses to describe hospitals.

- [1] One rarely has good memories of a hospital:
no first loves; no fat, healthy summer days;
no pink scraps of dawn; instead, like a hangnail,
- [5] the mind catches on the soft hush of disposable
hospital shoe covers, the metallic rungs sweeping
privacy curtains closed, the shadows of shoulders
slumped, shuddering in grief. My mom taught me
to play gin rummy¹ in a hospital. It was the day
the doctors stopped my baby brother's heart,
- [10] sewed it up, started it again. We stole the blanket
they returned him in, as if we needed a fabric
reminder
of the seconds his heart was still, of the hours we
waited,
- playing rummy to 1,000 and 1,000 and 1,000
again.
Years later, it's that smell I can't forget: crisp,
medicinal,
- [15] even after countless cleanings, the retained scent
of sweat,



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- tainted with fear. Thin white blankets, freshly
folded
on the foot of my boyfriend's father's bed. And when
I cannot look at his family huddled in shock and sorrow,
- adjusting to the verdict of cancer, I look at the blankets,
[20] the hospital name stamped in blue, on every single blanket.
Mercy. Between the memorized route to the cafeteria,

1. a two-player card game

dry erase boards for the next nurse to mark her name,
the yellow sad faces to measure pain, how is this compassion,
a leniency from God? Show me the grace in tearing holes

- [25] in the hearts of six month-old babies? The charity of cancer, eating
families away, father by grandfather? Erase the stink of hospital from my
nostrils, let my grief be dirty and jagged. I have no need for mercy.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is a theme of the poem?
 - A. The tragedies of life can make it difficult to believe in a forgiving God.
 - B. The stress of medical crises often tears families apart.
 - C. Fearing death is more painful than the actual process of dying.
 - D. Believing in a higher power makes it easier to move beyond loss.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer from Part A?
 - A. "even after countless cleanings, the retained scent of sweat / tainted with fear." (Lines 15-16)
 - B. "how is this compassion / a leniency from God? Show me the grace in tearing holes / in the hearts of six month-old babies?" (Lines 23-25)
 - C. "cancer, eating / families away, father by grandfather?" (Lines 25-26)
 - D. "Erase the stink of hospital from my / nostrils, let my grief be dirty and jagged." (Lines 26-27)

3. PART A: Which of the following best describes the speaker's tone in the poem?
 - A. calm and accepting
 - B. sarcastic and dismissive
 - C. detached and unemotional
 - D. bitter and discontent

4. PART B: Which of the following details from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "the soft hush of disposable / hospital shoe covers, the metallic rungs sweeping / privacy curtains closed" (Lines 4-6)
 - B. "It was the day / the doctors stopped my baby brother's heart" (Lines 8-9)
 - C. "dry erase boards for the next nurse to mark her name, / the yellow sad faces to measure pain" (Lines 22-23)
 - D. "Erase the stink of hospital from my / nostrils, let my grief be dirty and jagged. I have no need for mercy." (Lines 26-27)

5. How does the poet use imagery to describe the nature of hospitals?
