Autobiography of My Hungers

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night shift

to supplement my income while going to school, I took a
position as a residence counselor at a group home for developmentally disabled adults. Since I was new I was given the
graveyard shift, working from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., and all
I had to do before I left was feed the residents breakfast and
start dispensing pills. Otherwise the job was low maintenance.
Most of them, knocked out on medication, slept all night. I
slept a few hours at a time, slumped over the dispensary desk,
playing music at low volume. I had taken up smoking because
everyone around me smoked, and I sat on the back porch
in front of a bucket all the other counselors also used as an
ashtray.

One night, craving company, I ventured to have a smoke
on the front porch, where a few night owls sat past midnight.
No one even flinched when I took my place among them. We
all puffed away in silence, four weary bodies breathing in
each other’s stale air.

Around one in the morning, a man walked by and stopped
in front of the porch. “Good evening,” he called out. “Isn’t it
past your bedtime? Shouldn’t you all be inside?”

No one answered.

Frustrated, the man then asked, “Is your counselor
around? Can I talk to him?”
night shift

After a few seconds of silence, one of the residents replied, “No one here but us crazies.” The rest of us laughed. When the man stormed off, shaking his head, we laughed harder still as the cigarette box was passed around, and I couldn’t remember if it belonged to one of the residents or if it was mine.