

NATALIA PRUSINSKA

Americanitis

If I can't sleep because I'm obsessing
over typos I didn't catch
& the cut on my hand I didn't wash
& how my mother told her boyfriend
about me & *he's "ok with it."*
If I start making more mistakes,
the elastic of my mind stretching
under the bloat of exhaustion & stress.
If my mistakes are noticeable.
If I'm laid off along with thousands
of other employees because the stock price
needs a quick fix, the company shaking
its fat capital for a bigger piece of the future.
If I can't find a new job for the same reasons
I lost my old job. If my money is disappearing
like privacy & fathers & gas from my first truck
with its partially rusted gas tank.
If my chronic health issues get worse,
stomach inflamed like a circus ring.
If I don't want to spend money getting help
because it'll only make me more stressed.
If any emergency happens.
If I'm laid up watching a YouTube video
about a clinic in Los Angeles,
& the doctor on the screen says
the best way to help some of his patients
would be to give them money.
If I paint my whole body with the stuff
of fear. If my doctor's bonus
is dependent on how much she bills.
If the wealthy, knowing all this,
toast their successes
with cocktails named after us.
Bitter Them Than Us. American Mule.

Note: This poem was inspired by the book *Quick Fixes* by Benjamin Y. Fong, and partially quotes from the following line: "One of the earliest American users of cocaine, the ophthalmologist Herman Knapp, painted his whole body with the stuff, even injecting it into his penis and, 'for the sake of completeness,' his rectum."