

Paracentesis

The first time I held your hand,
Your eyes were unfocused—
Staring off to some unknown golden horizon,
its yellow hues reflecting itself onto your sclerae.
A thick needle punched into your engorged
belly and liters drained from you, like rivers to
the sea. You smiled.

We did that many more times, day after
day— bottle after bottle full of sloshing
fluid (amber, with a blush of pink).
I'd hand an empty bottle over, get a filled one
back and shudder internally at its warmth.
It was as if there was a whole ocean inside
you, surging back each day. We'd force an
ebb
only to be met with more roaring flow.

Yet always, you'd grip my hand
and smile that same unfocused grin.

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You were young.
Your family didn't want to know words like
liver cancer, kidney failure, metastasis.
They knew words like husband, father,
friend; words like hope, miracles, prayer.
A whole world of people came to your bed.

But soon, a thick fog settled outside your door.
We could feel it in the halls. We could see it in the
trails of saltwater on your loved ones' faces.
I could count it in each new bottle we took from you.

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I was the last one in your room, after all the chaos had
settled. I pulled out your lines, one by one,
each another rope that had tethered you to
life. Gently, I unmoored you and set you adrift.

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