

Requiem

I find you outside, smoking
oxygen tank placed carefully to the side
basking in the last colors of the fall
I would've covered you in nicotine patches
gone back in time and snuffed your cigarette
when you first stole one from Dad's pack
and lit it out behind the shed
trying to hide the scent with Febreze
and orange-scented hand sanitizer

With each drag, your cells shivered
swelling until some poor intern
sat down on the edge of your bed
and stuttered out a death sentence
"We've found something"
as if it could be treasure or puppies
and isn't always something ugly and slimy
slithering forth from an organ system
you'd long stopped considering

I sit down on the bench beside you
and watch the ambulances go by
You smile crooked and ask if I want one
I laugh, knowing my wife will kill me
just for having the smoke on my jacket
and that bitter look in the back of my eyes
A moment of silence slides past us
joining the bustling exodus
of newly christened and sacred old

Finally, you turn and ask me how long
I'm sure your world will never be green again
but will end in brown or red or gold
Instead I tell you it's hard to know
and you pull deeply on your cigarette
Each of us charts our course
and waits for the last leaf to fall.

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