

The Feast

My father is hosting the final picnic.

He rolls a melon back and forth
on the slate table to steady it

and slice, each piece bleeding
onto a white plate. The coals turn
gray but still flicker and burn, with raw

meat slung on top of the grill, oozing
blood red to clear. In the river
bordering the grove, a lone man paddles

his arms, stomach pressed
to a blue surfboard.
Black and white ripples

radiate from him while boats knock
against the pier. The children
gather their Frisbees from grass,

their volleyballs and racquets, appearing
and disappearing
in bright shirts like confetti.

Their voices rise and fall. It is late.

The sun shines, but not
for much longer. The golden hour

has begun. For a moment
the moss-covered trees glow
lime green, frozen in their looming

heights. My father: white shirt,
gray pants, silver wristwatch,
glasses. He always cut the melon.

The plates are ready, the food
is hot, the watermelon cold
and seedless. And our lives,

for a moment, are an untouched
meal: perishable, and delicious,
one we've barely begun to taste.

Zofran

Then, the atrophy of appetite.
We brought your favorite stew:
potatoes, the forbidden beef. We brought
coffee with sugar and cream. Surely,
the smell of it, the steam. . . .
You would not. So we scalded
our tongues with food meant
for you. We found the coconut sweets
you liked but you would not. The insult
of their stripes: pink, brown, white—
a flag from a country to which
you couldn't return. We slipped
the candied cubes from the wrappers
meant to keep them fresh,
innocent and useless.

A covered dish arrived—*Don't open it.*
Another tray arrived—*Don't. Open.*
Meal after meal you would not eat.
You could not.
The sea in you refused to cease movement.
Even the doctor's amber pills
you heaved aside
 like so much beach glass.
Outside each leaf
 began to bleed yellow
like dampened saffron
as we yielded one grief to the next.

Resolution

Today I will
do better. Today
I will not return

to the airport drunk
and blame the clerk
for shortchanging me

as I pay for coffee
that will fail
to erase the haze

I'd made for myself
in those dark hours—
you know to which

I refer—when no amount
of consolation,
neither trees nor prayer,

not ocean or peak,
neither living creature
nor inanimate thing,

neither the friends
whom I adore nor
the coastal elk

that once renewed me
on a hike with my love
along the rocky beach

of another life, with all
its fog-hidden green
and promise,

one whose snags
and troubles were so small,
so small

we can hardly see them now
from this new horizon
with which we have been left

one whose sweep
is nearly majestic
in its fullness—

how it swallows
everything before it
with its flatness, all

flat lines and flat sounds
of a terminal at the bedside—
the news ticker

cutting the screens
a constant source of crisis—
What was it

I wished for?
No matter. Today
I will do better.

Today I'll make good
on all promises.

Cancer Weather

It's cancer weather: the cells

make

and the cells break.

In this weather my father

fell ill.

Chicken Little, no use

to shout about it

now

the sky's already down.

Perhaps you, too, can sense it:

how bitter

the alcohol chill

of winter, wicking

every word

from the mouth.

The Longest Hour

makes children of your peers,
infants of superiors. The too-short
gown. The catheter. The hourly
scrutiny, phlegmatic lights
sterilizing everything.

*

The blood suctioned
beyond his skin, cleaned and returned.
And the witnessing. Again, the terrible
witnessing. The curtains shriek
and cringe on their cogs. Will nothing
be spared; will nothing remain unseen?

*

When the body undoes
its beauty, will you see how shroud-like
the bed sheets, how small the bones
against them? How cold
the clinic at night. No number
of blankets could warm him.

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So few chances to speak,
it seemed, to my father, as I watched him dim
in that cold white bed. In pain but not wanting
to die, he tried to take his sickness in stride.
White doctor Black doctor Asian doctor
placing hands on his chest, a daily oracle.

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Pacing in waiting rooms.
Foam cups of bitter tea. Gaunt-faced physicians
appearing, reappearing. The daily ablutions, then
preparing my gloved hands. Gowned body.
Masked face. The thumbed brochure of answers:
What's the role of God in suffering?