

# 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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