

# 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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