

Going home



Illustration by Sarah Riedmann

The pager pulses insistently:
Code team, first floor lobby.
We gather our bags, our legs,
and rush headlong into the cold.
It's late December. Dark clouds
tower, obscuring the horizon.

I find him fading, there
on the marble floor.
His borrowed marrow falters.
Fungus blooms in his lungs.
Scant blood drips, reluctant,
from the gash above his temple.

I crouch over him and check
his eyes, his tongue, his teeth.
Just a fall. Probably needs a CT.
His wife hovers behind me,
hands restless, frantically
reaching across a widening gap.

I motion towards the stretcher
but his face hardens.
He's counting minutes and miles,
a rough reckoning,
of time to destination
as snow hangs heavy in the air.

The house waits,
its wide porch overlooking
a few acres and a pond.
A pair of muddy boots
stands at attention by the door,
last sentries of that distant kingdom.

Deep below, something cracks.
A lonely flake drifts down
and settles on the road

—Michael J. Slade, MD, MSCI