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## Palliatives

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Three hours it took, to discard all the pills  
according to the rules for opiates.  
We could have cured a lot of user ills  
had we been willing to ignore those writs,  
the hospice nurse and me. But she'd brought kits  
designed to render painkillers inert  
with cat litter and other sundry grits  
and agents, and we mixed until it hurt.  
Then, all your analgesics turned to dirt,  
we bagged them up as per the regs, disposed  
of them the way we should. Goodbyes were curt.  
I sank into a chair as front door closed.  
What had we measured: Suffering? Relief?  
To cast out bitterness? Or welcome grief?

## The Readers

As nurse I played librarian, made lists—  
like yours of every title on our shelves—  
and spoke like earnest desk clerk who assists  
good patrons, ever searching for themselves.  
The medicines, the real nurses' names,  
the clinics' and the doctors' numbers—all  
set down: that's how a cataloguer tames  
untameable collection, hospice sprawl.  
And we were quiet in the reading room  
as ceiling rose beyond cathedral height  
and all us readers looked up from our tome  
while staying up to study late one night.  
You'd found a passage, marked it, took it home.  
I wrote a card and held it to the light.

## Sinew

Physicians learn the strings, but not who holds  
the crossed sticks that manipulate each move.  
Some think it clear, some hidden in the folds,  
and some don't care. Why trust what you can't prove?  
With push and pull the doctors test our strength,  
and we comply, exerting as we're told,  
or demonstrating by unchanging length  
of sinew that we're too sick or too old.  
Look here, says the anatomist, observe  
where tendon fixes muscle to the bone.  
The students nod, some viewing duct, some, nerve,  
but all sure their command of fact has grown.  
Our errors will sort out someday, like strands  
of sinew that lent virtue to our hands.

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