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Sugar Bones / Burden of Proof

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Sugar Bones

Toward the end, she would be caught slipping in and out of dreams, wrapped in memories she didn't know to forget, strong delusions of her whereabouts kneeling on her eyes—while one by one the tumors took refuge in her lungs, treading deeper into the column of her spine. And while the cancer spread within the confines of her territory, over and over again she would scream in pain, so severe she would squeeze out tears down the valleys of her cheeks, asking for more and more analgesics.

After a point in time, the morphine drip wasn't enough and having reached the recommended dose, we had no options left but to give her a handful of sugar bones—multi-coloured jelly beans—and watch, almost instantly, the dissolving of her frown, lips lightening with comfort, her voice renewing vigor, turning more alive. And for a long time after, I would sit and think about the mysterious mechanics of the imagined relief, felt as an outcome of expectation alone; therapeutic enough—the mere act of giving, the watchful receiving, the body reacting with wonder.

Burden of Proof

the burden of proof is upon us to show that zebrafish hearts
can scarlessly grow back, after burning nearly half of it—
bottom up from the conical tip—not just an outcome of
surgery alone.

so, we divvy the fish, from Boston flown,
into experimental ones and age-matched controls, lay them
down in beds of foam
and wait until they fall asleep—grow motionless with a gaze
transfixed, lose the fanning motion of gills, slow down the
tuning pitch of breaths, until a pause persists ...

* * *

and then the quick calisthenics of tools—scissors slicing skin,
breaking scales
grown thick over fragile chests, tweezers, clinking sharp
blades, parting in-between pairs of glistening fins and
afterward—the swift release
into tanks of water, patient waiting
for the slow reawakening from breathlessness, from the
anesthetics, from the sham
surgeries—shame, I feel shame at the hurting, at the apparent
point-
lessness of suffering, at the thought of consent—wondering if
only I could speak the language of fish, if
only they could know our intent.

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