

Abecedarian Endings

Kathryn Gilmore

Asthmatic breaths come first—
Before the biopsies and ER trips.
Cutting through storybook narrations,
Dragging out lullabies, stuttered
Exhalations— a soundtrack
Familiar to me as the strums of his
Guitar, echoing through out
Home. It was a faint worry,
In time, enhanced by the blooming
Jaundice across his skin,
Kindling a fear that had always been
Lurking there with the cancer in his liver.
Months of surgeries,
Numbly listening to
Offers of
Palliative care,
Questions of comfort in final days,
Realizing nightmares that
Soaked being a
Teenager in grief.
Undulating pulses,
Virulent infections,
White hospice blankets turned crimson,
X-rays of a liver, trying to prepare for some kind of future— a girl in a
Yellow school uniform
Zealously studying for the ACT next to her father’s deathbed.

Alleyway Overdose

Lizzy de Foy

“Cardiac arrest in an alleyway – fat fucking chance,” Dylan said, flipping on the lights and sirens.

Luke laughed, and the ambulance jolted as he began to weave through the traffic we’d been stuck in. “That’s firefighters for ya.” I leaned towards the separation window excitedly. “You mean it’s an overdose?” I’d never had an overdose patient before.

“Yeah, probably,” Luke said. “Patient’s passed out in an alley. We’ll let you give the Narcan.” I grinned. After a few sleepy days spent at a firehouse in the suburbs, my first ride-along with the city fire department was quite the change of pace. Cyndi Lauper filled the ambulance as we swerved onto the highway, blaring lyrics and sirens alike.

“Oooh, girls just wanna have fun...”

It was not an overdose. Firefighters swarmed the scene. The patient came into view as I passed around a parked truck: an older black woman with thick silver-gray hair was lying on her back in a driveway. A firefighter was bent over her, doing compressions. As I got closer, I saw unnaturally blue eyes, wide open and staring at the sky.

Luke tossed me the glucose kit. “Get a sugar on her, would you?” I knelt next to her in the debris and took her limp hand in mine to get the reading.

Luke drilled into her tibia – *intraosseous*

infusion, my mind supplied – and administered the first dose of epinephrine. Up by her head, a firefighter was pushing breaths into her with a bag valve mask. As the compressions and the BVM forced air into her stomach, she began to vomit. It pooled in her mouth.

“You wanna suction her?” Luke asked. I took the suction catheter from him and knelt by her head, heart racing. My EMT textbook flipped open in my mind’s eye. *Place the rigid suction catheter into the patient’s mouth only as far as you can see.* I placed the hard plastic tube into her mouth and sucked out the vomit, making wide circles.

Luke peered into her mouth and shook his head. “Nah, go deeper.” I forced it down her throat, and thick orange vomitus shot up through the plastic tubing. In and out, I pushed the catheter until the vomit stopped coming. It occurred to me that suctioning *only as far as you can see* was fairly useless. Had that textbook’s author ever been in the field?

The patient continued to vomit: keeping her airway clear was rapidly becoming an issue. Luke took the breathing tube Dylan handed him, turning back to me. “Wanna place the i-gel?”

“Absolutely.” I looked down at the thick rubber tube and hesitated. *Never place a supraglottic airway without first administering lubricant.* “No lube?”

“Nah, just stick it in,” he said. *Okay...* It