

The Malignant Lottery

The element that stood out the most
when they gave us the diagnosis
were the bright red splotches
that seemed to rapidly spread and
darken against the skin along the
back of his neck. The rest of that terrible night
and the next long day were nothing
but a series of events and emotions,
burned into my mind; ups and downs -
a veritable roller coaster that I'll never forget.

The cold walk outside in the empty
emergency parking lot, nervously waiting
for the ambulance to take him away.
The way the exhaust from our
lungs hung on the air like a fog
in the night. The lonely, hour long
drive down winding 315, narrowly avoiding
a herd of deer barely visible through
headlights and blurred vision as I
fought to hold back yet another round
of salty tears. Aimlessly losing myself
in the empty, modern building of cancer research
with its glass walls and red and grey couches,
vacant of any Buckeyes at four a.m.

Finding myself again on the fifteenth floor.
The AML clinical trials sign, my first indication
of how real the situation was.
The shock that was ever present on his
face – gaze distant and slow, cheeks pale –
even when a nurse would crack
a joke and have him laughing. The first bag
of cryoprecipitate with its color and
consistency of cooking lard. And then toxin.
crystal-clear bags of arsenic-trioxide
brightly labeled in golden yellow,
“We’re going to poison you like a rat!”

Being told repeatedly how lucky he was.
That word – lucky, like he’d won the lottery
only it was cancer, so it was more like
he had won his life, but at a cost – lucky.
APL, acute promyelocytic leukemia.
The jackpot of cancers that all oncologists
would wish for, if they had to have cancer.