

Keeping That Cancer Letter to Myself

(For my late mother Zinab Habhab Hamod)

It's as if
I can hold time back
as if
I can keep that letter in my briefcase
as if I can
keep my mother
still alive
upstairs in the white room, as if I
can still hear
her blood soaked
cough want to tell her it is
something that will pass, lie to
her, tell her the letter is good, the
treatments will work, tell her that
we'll make that trip to Romania
get some of those "miracle drugs" we keep
reading about, that we'll sit on the front
porch again in the spring marvel at
the clarity of air,
talk about when she was a little girl in
Iowa
when the circus would come to the field
across the road, when she raised her
brothers and sisters after her mother
died when she was nine-baking bread
each morning
and each year the exciting circus would
return- that we'll get her passport
ready it will be a long flight we can-
then there's that deep wrenching
cough again
and I'll lie
again, tell her that she's worried for
nothing
that the pain in her stomach is only
gas, I'll choke up again unable to
talk turn away my swelling
throat tight, unable to-then we'll
strain out talk of dandelions and
grapeleaves
we'd pick when I was a boy, by the river in
Iowa,
by the roadsides in Indiana, then she
falls asleep, moves fitfully go back to
my briefcase not open it
wish the letter away- now that she's
passed, that briefcase sits, full of
papers, unopened, but my eyes blur in
this poem

because in this life
there are some things we never fully close

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