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VIGIL

When he tells us he is dying, he does it with blood.
He puts a color on his face that means
he has one foot already out the door,
dangling over nothing.

We gather. In a story someone is telling
he is seventeen. Deep sea fishing. And I see it—
sunburned, sticky with salt. Screaming into the horizon,
shivering at the way the sound hangs and fades
with no echo.

Now the space between each breath stretches, a stillness settles in.
He recedes from his body like the image on an old fashioned television
switched off. Slowly shrinking to black, leaving us staring
at our own reflections.

Looking at him, we know that absence can deepen.
A division by zero.

His eyelids, like heavy velvet curtains
drawn against an emptying stage.

—Amelie Meltzer

Pitt Med student Amelie Meltzer's (Class of 2022) "Vigil" was commended in the Hippocrates Prize, 2019 FPM-Hippocrates Health Professional Awards. It's included in the 2019 Hippocrates Prize Anthology*, which came out in May and can be ordered at hippocrates-poetry.org/order-2019-hippocrates.html.*

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