

## Indigo

By Susan Sample

Backstroke is my strength, I tell myself, pulling  
the raft's oars into my chest with a single, strong  
motion. Cliffs rise from the river, looming  
pale as clouds, cut through with dark swaths  
of coal. Days later, on the hospital's fourth floor,  
strips of black marbled linoleum are worn through  
on the threshold of patient rooms. The mass is darker  
on the X-ray of her lung, my friend tells me.  
The second bag of Vancomycin drips silently  
through her iv; ice packs balance  
where her breast was. It's not as quiet  
farther west in a chemotherapy suite  
of pic lines, Hickmans, and ports. I listen  
to the rhythm of Retuxin infusing my father.  
The slow drip clicks like an aperture set for a long exposure:  
one sleeve of his favorite fleece rolled up. He calls it  
*blue*, though it is darker, navy perhaps, or cobalt,  
grayer than the quilt the nurse unfurls from a basket  
to cover him with a hundred tiny squares tied with yarn  
azure--yes, *l'zur*-- not the weighted blue of the bowl  
he ate cereal from as a boy that I found on the shelf  
in his apartment this morning. I took it down and  
rocked it in my hands, watching as waves of glaze glistened  
in sunlight or tears, I won't be able to remember.

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