

Masa—Hospitalist

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Birds in the yard picking
grapes from the few vines
I long ago figured
would never amount to much
with all this fog.

Your voice comes through
from some other place,
conversational, not lonely
as I would have thought.

I should put netting up,
try and salvage something,
for a bottle of wine
to share with a friend.

You laugh at me—
“Why’d you plant them if
you were going to let the birds
eat them? All the digging?
All the blisters.”
I hear you from somewhere
beyond this place.

But the birds are happy today,
grapes dark, sticky sweet and purple
in the sunlight. The leaves deep green,
bright with a life that hurts my eyes.

I could give you a hard time too
for avoiding the throbbing
of your head and eyes,
the first call of leukemia.

Or for how you left this place,
46 years old,
2 years after Kai was born,
the *miracle baby*, you and Christine called him.
after 10 years of trying,
the specialists having given up—

Even harsher, I could ask
what you meant
getting sick and dying—leaving
us to care for all the patients.

But I won’t do that today as
it’s not that kind of day
the birds so contented and all.

Instead I will recount
Your stories of free diving for abalone near
Mendocino, gulls overhead,
kelp, seals, the occasional shark, below.
Each diver allowed only one.
Afterward, driving back to San Francisco,
fog thick.

The birds eating grapes,
I should do something,
about that happiness.
They sing and dance in the sun,
jabber at each other,
bellies full. The emptiness sometimes.

I understand your death no better than
the beautiful inner side of the abalone shell
after you’d crack it open
long after you’d come up for air,
out of the kelp and the cold,
panting, completely alive, a big smile
as you walked to shore,
catch in hand.