**Someone Turned Up the Volume on the Patterns**

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*After Joy Harjo’s line in a poem commemorating Alva Mae Benson’s life: “And we go on, keep giving birth and watch / ourselves die, over and over. / And the ground spinning beneath us / goes on talking.”*

I sift through your meticulously penned pages of Medication Administration charts–a type of armor against cancer, against all dreaded probability.

 **Xopenex Mvit. Ca+**

**mild stomach pain 9-11 10 4**

**CT scan 9-0 - -**

**2/25/12 - 0700 - severe back pain; unable to move; Decadron / Dilandid**

I grieve what these records won’t tell me. I imagine how perhaps some days, you’d wake up feeling shipwrecked, alone, each passerby misreading your S.O.S. How dependent you became on each doctor, oncologist, to get the dosages right for your petite body. The times you could not accept an NICU shift, the sick leave hours–tapped out. The way other nurses offered theirs to you like clothes off their backs.

The constant exhaustion, the painted-on smile while everyone else hummed along to their favorite songs. The bottles of medication that your cabinet displayed, like a loaded breakfast tray when your stomach could only churn.

I could burn in this grief. Smoldering, the summer of 2012: the last time you flew in an airplane. You came with my younger sister, made every visible effort to glow at my graduation, in your glittery black dress and pearl drop earrings. I could not detect the flinching behind your radiant smile. I held that diploma paper in front of me, grinning in my cap and gown and purple lei, knowing the success belonged to us both.

Black cursive swirled around us both, too.

**5/1/12 - Coughing up bloody mucus**

**5/9/12 - Radiation Day #1**

I grieve the unfathomable torment sutured into each column and row.

**“Treatment Calendar: Cycle 1”**

**Side Effects Notes:**

 **Tingling of palms, sharp, itchiness dizzy, coughing, sore throat**

 **Numb palm coughing, tired**

 **Jaw pain 11:40 - appt.**

 **Tired, weak, coughing worked 3-11:30pm, coughing**

 **Tongue sores, jaw pain rad site red**

I despair I wasn’t there for you that summer, that fall, when you were falling apart. I wasn’t there when you returned home, home to cracked fingers and small dark spots forming. Chemo pills, on for two weeks, off for three. Xeloda. Cardiac ECHO. Vitamins. So many hospital appointments. The smell of latex gloves and ointment. The incessant sound of beeping monitors.

**8/11/12 coughing large amount - yellow; short of breath**

**10/18/12 chest / rib pain**

**wheezing wheezing**

**wheezing wheezing wheezing**

 **wheezing wheezingwheezingwheezing**

We thought we had the antibodies. The “fight breast cancer” walks and lit paper bags with names of survivors. The pink highlighter ink on a gifted shirt: *Get well soon! You’re so brave!* I study each hopeful message, hug them all to my breast. Each wave in me: breaking, rising.

**1/18/13 6am - intense lung pain**

**1/31/13 To ER for severe stomach pain**

The records stopped. The socializing stopped. You needed silence for your tired bones, tired from dragging the portable oxygen machine everywhere. I heard your weak voice over the phone telling me to *come now.* In the hospital room, we held your hands in ours. And then–the drift. I know now: grief is madness, an intravenous curse. Your island could no longer supply your needs. High tide swept across the coast, bluer than bruised skin.

The waters thrum with a heartbeat all on its own. It’s where you live now.