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Family Medicine

NARRATIVE ESSAY

An Old Doctor Remembers

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So much depends upon numbers, like water streaming
from mountaintop to me. Apollo, please bring
the rules of thumb, the formulae. I sing
in hope that you will hear me pleading

to know how salt brings water to fill this withered shrew
admitted overnight. On earth for eighty years, she straps
her arms across her childish chest. A toddler mad that naps,
then wakes to cry: the old, loved toy was switched for new.

My recall gasps like fish fresh banked. Her face impatient for a fight.
Salts and fluids swirl in circle, just out of reach
those days when all the numbers bowed to teach
me how to master water and electrolyte.

"I want to go home!" she insists,
while I pant to marshal algorithm and acronym
that tantalize mindless of rhythm
or rhyme. I clench my fists. Wait! It's

FENa.

Both she and I are old – reconstituting memories dried by years.
I flat pressed like flower in book on shelf; she bleached bone dry
as breastbone left on sill – no child to pry
apart to make a wish. Forgotten souvenirs.

The chloride, sodium, creatinine – I finally grasp
the calculation. She only needs to drink old H2O,
while I recover facts I used to know.
If only memory stayed fixed within my clasp,

without a taunt or – worse – a threat to kill my thirst
with river Lethe that forces to forget
the facts and figures and math – to set
me on a path that all familiar feels like first.

Late afternoon, she does go home with all
her numbers arrayed in place, and when I drive
close past her house, the bowing sun embraces her face, alive
and thriving – regal – on porch. Arms crossed to call

her subjects to order. They kneel before their demigod.
She blesses baby, kin, and dog. They bring drink to stir
the memory of who she was and is. Confer
on her the timeless crown. Our eyes touch. We nod.

I do remember her.