

POETRY

A good day

Hoy es un buen día, señora,
I tell her, my eyes betraying my fears
as they had on days before

Her eyes stare through me as she mouths *Gracias, Doctor.*
The very thought of the words causing her to strain
against the breathing tube we placed just yesterday,
while the amassing weight of her abdomen, filling with
blood, crushes what little spirit remains.

I think this will really be it,
I say to the family for what must be the tenth time,
half embarrassed to be hopeful while their
mother, wife, daughter
lies dying within arms' reach.

We are so lucky the cancer centre
accepted her,
never mind it took them six weeks.
A massive tumour is not an emergency.
She only has emergency Medicaid.
We have to get emergency approval from the finance office.
What could have been more emergent than saving the life
and dignity of a woman who has raised six children?
We'll have an answer for you tomorrow

It's because she's undocumented,
the family would half say, half ask,
repeating the statement often, sometimes using the word
"illegal,"
as if to alternately accept and then eschew blame.
Do you think she'd be okay now if she'd come in sooner?
They give me too much credit as prognosticator, as referee
between life and death.

She calls you her angel,
the youngest, at 15, says as her thumbs glide through the
text message she composes,
partly for distraction, partly because she's emerged as the
family centre.
El buen doctor es mi ángel, she's always saying.
I smile, mutter something about doing this together.
The sugary words hurt my teeth.



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Un buen día,
I repeat with purpose, gripping her hands tightly with mine,
urging the diminishing strength from my own body into hers.

The nurse who has known the family for the same six
weeks as I
appears with news that the transfer is confirmed.
The paramedics are on their way up.

Air in the room is heavy, even stifling,
but I play my role as doctor, as *angel*,
give hugs all around,
manage one final "*Un buen día,*"
before turning to hide tears I would rather not explain.

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