

CURATIVES

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My brother has been sobering up a year
when I visit the first place he's paid rent

since illness dried him out. He stirs onion,
garlic, and ginger into a simmering curry

and lifts a ladle to his lips. Thicker strands
of sinew ripple in his back each time I visit,

the work of years spent swimming against
the current of his blood. A striper's needle-

thin rib catches between the calcified ridges
of his teeth, dances as he tongues it—then

grinds it to nothing. It seems impossible
that he wakes some mornings paralyzed

by microbes trying to mortar his spine
into an unbending tower. I used to take

so many pills my heart forgot its rhythm,
but I thought we had both settled down

until his ex- bragged that he had once,
in handcuffs, licked ex off the floor

of a jail-cell. We give our bodies so many
reasons to fight back, but no one knows

exactly what started his blood's war
against his spine. As he adds turmeric

and cumin to the curry, he tells me more
than I remember or believe about herbs'

curative properties. His doctor claims
a new serum might prevent spinal fusion

by killing white blood cells, or it might
just ravage his veins. It doesn't matter

what hope the doctor or I harbor
for that solution slim as a fishbone,

slim as the needle that put our cousin
in the ground last month. What matters—

what has to matter—is the work of his will
against the current, how he welcomes

the water coursing over his skin each day.