

Dad Leaves

Dad knew of his death
long before mother phoned to say
he wasn't doing well. Husband,
three kids and I dashed to New York,
two hours later tiptoed into his

private hospital room, as he gasped for air
from oxygen prongs jammed up his nose:
this loving father of mine who has
witnessed war and death
way too many times.

We quietly moved towards his bed,
slung our arms over its side rails.
His eyes slowly opened and a smile
flickered from his chapped lips
as he tried lifting himself to hug me.

He asked about our trip. My kids nudged closer
and a tear seeped onto his unshaven
cheek. *I love you guys*, he said with a
barely audible whisper,
robbing him of all his remaining energy.

I'm not well, he said, rolling his head
back and forth on the foamless pillow,
begging me to help him one way or another.
Do you want a rabbi, I asked. He nodded *no*,
*your mother wants to put me in a psychiatric ward
with the crazies. She says I am depressed.
What should I do?*

With my nursing hat still positioned on my head,
I turned to the coldest part of the room
and told her *she* belonged in that unit
as I looked deep into father's eyes—
the same ones which always reminded
me of my wonder.

I imagined how I would feel
if I were leaving behind
a wife who resented me,

a daughter who adored me
and three grandchildren
who could not let go.
I swallowed my grief.