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Panning

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Poetry

This poem was written as a spontaneous response to a friend whose email announced the recurrence of an adolescent cancer, now Stage 3–4. The insights that have followed, he said, felt like gold panned from a cold stream. I closed my eyes, typed the poem in a fluid whole, then edited for typos and polishing.

Robert A. Neimeyer

Panning

for Alex

Since the diagnosis
I have been panning for gold.

Alone in this river, I brace
against the onrush—
inexorable, consistent,
pulling me downstream
with its cold hand.
For now, I find a foothold
in the stony bed.

My limbs stiffen, numb
in the chill current,
the pain in my gut
 forgotten.

The rush of water muffles
the voices from the shore,
the common industry of towns.

The same flood that presses me away
frees the glistening lumps
laced through the matrix upstream,
tumbles them seaward.

Waist high in foam,
I bend, plunge, delve
the sturdy pan into the scree,
draw up the find.

With practiced eye I spy
the glint of a vaster orb above,
a silent witness,
and turn my face to god.

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