The unwanted guest

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It started out as just a headache,
Mild, minor, then sharp as a razor.
He wasn't too worried.
"It'll go away, doc,
Stop worrying about me. I'm 24 years old."

His acute myeloid leukemia had been detected
On a routine blood panel.
In a single moment, this young man's life was uprooted,
All by the melancholy story betrayed by his blood smear.
"This isn't supposed to happen.
I'm too young for cancer."

No time for misery or despair:
His youth and his optimism would not allow it.
"Doc, what's next?" he eagerly asked.

He was admitted to the hospital immediately,
Ready to start the first cycle
Of induction chemotherapy.
But, as the night wore on
That recalcitrant pain persisted
And persevered
And just wouldn't go away.

Somewhere under his dura
Came crawling an insidious, surreal sensation,
Subtle waves of diffuse throbbing,
Then overt messengers of pain,
Then silence.

Inside his skull a pool of blood
Covered his meninges
Like an unwanted guest invading
His innermost being.

By early dawn
He wasn't as alert
Or interactive.
His brother at the bedside swiftly realized
Something terrible was happening.

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Stat CT, neurology, then neurosurgery,
It all happened so fast.
His wife was summoned to his bedside.

Breath failing him,
His awareness diminished,
He looked at her one last time
And whispered,
“I am so sorry for all of this.”
Midline shift was all she heard.

As she wiped a tear from her weary face,
Her confused, delirious husband
Was whisked away to the ICU.
She saw the wheels of a crash cart
And the airway team descending upon him.

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