19 y.o. white male, m.v.a.

so young, so much plumbing
tubes, wires, pumps and hoses
sugar, salt, medication going in
piss, pus and blood coming out
bleeping machines counting, tracking
his heartbeats, his breaths, his minutes
his losses, his advances, his chances
I voice the prayers of his sobbing mom,
his aunt, his uncle, his ten broken friends
telling God and them of love, grace, comfort
giving him up, giving them heart
nurses, docs, white clouds of them
swirling in/out, coming and going still trying
he will die but there seems so much to do

my kids would come home from school
tired, crabby and beaten, it was chemistry
low blood sugar; after macaroni and hot dogs
they would be flying again, talking and laughing
wrestling on the rug and giggling
life coursing again through their veins
they’re gone now
empty nested, I sit at the table
with their mother, my wife of a quarter century
sharing leftovers, she tells tales of her day
the drunken patient, the goofy resident, funny stuff
I tell of the 19 y.o. boy who died, it isn’t funny
it’s a conversation stopper, we fall silent
and clear the table
later I hear her on the phone with our daughter
laughing, new curtains, boys and gossip
I call my son, he got his first college B in English

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One Too Many

She cried and cared
   for sick and dying strangers.
Her heart could contain
   no more sadness,
   no more grief.
She'd been at the bedside of
   one too many.

Comforted one too many:
screaming children,
grief stricken mamas,
stalwart men,
cliche-producing helpers denting the silence.

Watched one too many:
alcoholics literally dying for drink,
smokers gasping for air,
addicts manipulating;
etire families in denial.

Walked alongside one too many:
   victims of neglect,
   abandoned elderly
   ex-vital bodies,
   dying helplessly alone.

Witnessed one too many:
families leave,
   while “everything” was done
   in the name of love;
   chests CPR bruised and broken.

Grieved with victim families of
gunshot wounds,
knife stabbings,
automobile accidents;
innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire.

She’d heard one too many
   Whys with no answers,
especially for herself.
Her heart was full of
   one too many
   sadnesses for others,
   leaving no room for her own.
She hugged compassion goodbye
   for a time to refill her spirit.

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