

To the woman at my mother's funeral who thought it was so lovely that my mother died at home

By Kathryn Paul

In my nightmares it is always four a.m. and
something threatens: bleeding or
choking or—foam.

Foam like lava.
Pouring from her mouth.
For hours.

The home health aide had never
seen anything like it. The hospice nurse
on the phone did not believe me.

In my nightmare it is four a.m. and the aide
is scooping foam and I'm running from bedside
to kitchen to laundry room and we're using
all the dish towels and all the dust rags and
all the hand towels and all the washcloths
and I start cutting up the fluffy peach bath towels,
the good ones from the hallway closet—
and I think she would be horrified by this
and time is stuck at four a.m. and we need
to give her morphine and Haldol and thank god
for morphine and Haldol but we can't get the dropper
past the foam, not even with all our scooping
so I call again, and there has been a shift change

and this nurse believes me and she sends
a man with a suction machine
and it takes him fifteen minutes
and we are out of towels before he gets here
and I am cutting up pillowcases and it's still four a.m.
and nobody's talking but somehow

we manage to get the machine assembled and it sounds like a freight train in the room with us
and I'm terrified to wake her but she has receded into a collection of cells decaying and we
finally get the morphine and the Haldol into the dropper and the dropper into her mouth and
I'm signing the receipt for the suction machine with my free hand and the aide is still scooping

and wiping with t-shirts now and there isn't a clean towel in the house and the sun will never
rise but I think—

we are finally
getting ahead
of the foam.

Kathryn Paul is a survivor of many things, including cancer and downsizing. Her poems have appeared in *Intima*, *Last Leaves*, *The Examined Life Journal* and *Rogue Agent*. Paul lives in Albuquerque, NM.

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