



## Six-Letter Words

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You liked crosswords.  
You did them  
quite literally  
until the day you died.

Turning black and white squares into grey scribbles.  
Ink smudged on your left hand  
a tattoo courtesy of the New York Times.

*What's a 6-letter word for 'sign of growth'?*  
you asked us during rounds.  
We shrugged.

The next day—  
*It's cancer* you told us.  
*6 letters, growth.*  
You were right.  
Twice.

We never touched.  
You never held my hand  
or brushed the hair from my face  
But I saw the way you held yourself.

Aged fingertips dancing across delicately folded newspaper.  
A woman wizened by almost a century of life  
yet humble enough to ask for crossword help.

And one evening  
your sterile room bathed in the honey of a Texas sunset  
I watched your jaundiced skin glow gold  
as I paled at the word *terminal*.

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It was quick.  
Which is good.  
Because I don't think you ever really lost the part of you  
that was so  
undeniably  
you.

When it was happening  
I wished I could tell you that I like crosswords, too.  
And that another 6-letter word for sign of growth  
is change.

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