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poems
by
doctors

The Motorcyclist

Colin Begg

At most deaths I have not noticed the faces
preferring the distraction of tubes and signs and CPR,
focusing on small detail

not the unclinical tableau of this man
found stretched on his back
over gravel and tarmac
near the high pass
on this bluest of leisure Sundays

We cut off his leathers
the district nurse, the off-duty paramedic
the mountain rescuer and I
while a kayaker kept his neck in line

His stove chest was gasping
His carotid pulse a fading stammer – stop.

And we kept him going ten, fifteen
rib-crunching minutes until an ambulance
came with proper kit

and I could taste the tar of his last cigarette
as I upped the technology, slipped
a clearly futile tube in his trachea
and we kept on, spurred by distant rotors
and *Helimed sets down in shallow bracken,*
how suddenly strange, my city colleagues are

Thirty-plus now and no pulse, the outcome set.
Congent, I look around –
and all our faces are that absent metaphor
for how it feels to try and fail to save a life.
Sore-kneed, I look down –
and see on his, a day's stubble
and the keenest blue
around his fixed, dilated pupils

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Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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