

FIRST PLACE - 2022

Co-Pay

We visit the doctor because you shake like the walk to the principal's office
They say your liver is fine
No cirrhosis, no failure
The one thing I counted on to kill you is keeping you alive
Maybe that's because I have taken every impact, softened every blow
Drowned my own cells in your cups, taken years off my own life in secret
My skin already withered by the reflection in your mirror, your lines in my face
On your last day they will give me mouth to mouth
To resuscitate my youth
Chest compressions to sing me back to sleep
After ten thousand nights with a ball of ice in my gut
Children pay for the sins of their fathers, I mutter as I cover your copay and carry the
weight of exactly two handles on my back
Yours is half full, with just enough shots to get by
And an empty one for the me I'll never know

-Devin Dierks

2016 graduate of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign