What Is It About This Substance?

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Artist's Statement

This poem is a reminder of the individual's experience in addiction, the acknowledgment of pain to self and others, the wish to change, and the powerlessness that can occur. Substance use disorders are ubiquitous in our field, and the reader may see a patient, a friend, a family member, or themselves in this poem. Our community recently lost a medical practitioner who, while in recovery, developed a chemical dependency treatment program which significantly helped educate our medical students and residents. This poem is dedicated to him.

What Is It About This Substance?

What is it about this substance
That causes me to abandon everything?
To suffer existential myopia;
To reduce salience to the size and weight
Of a singularity
As family and friends orbit
Like desperate moons,
Avoiding the event horizon
That is my addiction.
What is it about me, and not
My friends or siblings that
Allows for this condition?
Bad luck? Step on a crack?
Piss off the Devil (or God)?
This drug affects my life
By month, week, day;
By second.
It is not in my true nature
To behave this way-to talk
This way.
Compassion gives way to sociopathy,
Eloquence to profanity.
I stumble in the shadowy jungle
Addiction
Where the wild beast Substance
Has grabbed me by the throat
And won't let go.

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