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Gretchen Primack

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ONI, 1C

GRETCHEN PRIMACK

I

Diagnostics. Diagrams. Diagnosis.

II

I can feel it grow.
It began with
a yawn
in the tight
dark fist of
my uterus
as if it were
afraid to be
born. It
became
vigorous.
It deserved
the nourishment
of my body.

It would do
anything
to live. Appetite
satisfied,
it wanted
knowledge
and crawled
awkwardly
to my brain.
We cannot
both fit.

|||

It is the size
of a dumbfounded mouth.
The color
of the heart-shaped mark
a deer leaves in snow.
The size of five
pinballs stuck
behind a bumper.
The shape
of a shark's
tooth on the dunes.
Solid smoke. It's the size
of a blurred brown negative.
The color of the smudged face
in the print. The shape
of a forgotten flint.
The color of a fallen
rose head.
G.K.Chesterton's hornbill:
"simply
a huge yellow beak
with a small bird tied on
behind it."

IV

Malignancy.

Growth.

Sarcoma,

carcinoma,

melanoma.

Creeping ulcer.

The big "C."

Tumor.

Karkinos.

Crab.

Abnormal cells.

What you whisper.

Cancroid.

Neoplasm.

Cyst.

Lump.

Canker.

Plague.

V

When I breathe in

it breathes in.

I rinse the plate,

it rinses the plate.

The floor holds me up

and holds it up.

I close my eyes

when they feel dry.

It closes its eyes.

VI

What are fine:

Teeth. Lips.

Ears, fingers,

feet, nails,

knees. Cats.

Sink, chair, dish soap, bike pump, phone jack, phone cradle,
spice jars, jam jars, door jambs, tax file, nail file, file drawer,
drawing board: *back to the drawing board. Back to the wall.*

VII

My father has stomach cancer, my mother, pancreatic.

My uncle has prostate cancer.

My newest friend has renal cell carcinoma, my oldest, cancer of
the larynx.

His wife had lymphoma, my brother has myeloma; his son has
cancer of the esophagus.

My sister has skin cancer, my best friend has testicular cancer,
my aunt has cancer of the tongue and the thyroid and the
bladder and the breast.

My sixth-grade teacher has cervical cancer.

My seventh-grade teacher has oral cancer and the principal has
ovarian.

My last boyfriend had bone cancer and my next girlfriend will
have brain cancer.

My grandfather died of Hodgkin's disease.

VIII

*Once, it told me,
tucking me in last night,
I was so small
you didn't want me
gone.*

I wasn't ugly.

Pollen

dwarfed me.

But I noticed you.

You were a pod

I wanted to slit

open.

You were a cushion

I wanted to press into

like a pin

through silk,

press into the stuffing

with the softest

pop.

IX

It came with my intakes:

Food, dust, light.

It came with a shudder.

It stayed and stayed

with pleasure.

It has stacked its layers

one, another, another;

such hard work,

such admirable work.

X

There is so much time

now that there is so little time.

There is so much love

now that I am drained of love.

When I was a baby, I lived
and lived. Ate like I would live

forever. I was a risky teen:
I didn't feel immortal so

I sidled up to death,
made it my familiar.

So now I can say, I know you!
Oh I know you.

XI

It whisks off one, another,
another, it gallops its epidemic
haunches. It garners my
self. It takes dictation
from my tissue:

To Whom It May Concern:

I read last night,

*"Whatever you choose to claim
of me is always yours,
nothing is truly mine
except my name. I only
borrowed this dust."*

NOTES

Chesterton's quote is from *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Carroll & Graf, 1986.

The quote that ends the poem is from Stanley Kunitz's "Passing Through," *Next-to-Last-Things*, Norton, 1985.