
POETRY | FALL 2014

Admission Assessment

By Rachel Betesh

So plain this posture: upright,
so measured these breaths break: shallow

like rainwater with nowhere to settle:
he parcels air; he can't give it away.

he looks like the winter streets: bundled,

right there at his table, eyes cast down.
Back and forth with the ragged song of breathing.

Hoarse, clumsy with effort, cradling
the tumor most visible: his left hand

swollen loud and wrong, *grapefruit-sized*. . .

strange habit of medical analogy to edible things! This,
a hungry mass beneath the brown skin;

this, the second site: *metastasis*, from the first cancer
of his kidneys, but because he can't see his kidneys,

he waves his misshapen left hand to show me

what makes him sick: "Now it's everywhere,"
and the air seeps and sings out, out without measure.

This is what belongs in my assessment,
the honest space verbatim makes:

Reason for hospitalization, in patient's own words.

Blank lines that become the poem, song plainly spoken
in the lit room that holds us, my pen on the page.

For two weeks struggling to breath, eat, speak,
against the terrible music now spread to his lungs.

Now it's everywhere,

the natural sweetness of the body
reduced to laboring: an immeasurable effort,

unrecordable in his words, or the ones I borrow;
no pen or fruit can describe it: the sound of that song.

Rachel Betesh, RN, BSN is a clinical nurse with experience in oncology, hospice, and women's reproductive healthcare. She also studied poetry at Brown University. Her poems have been published in *The American Journal of Nursing* and *Apiary Magazine*.

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