

Constellation Rifts

By Alicia Sometimes

i. Collisions

I don't even drink coffee but I was told over the phone, *look you have cancer, can you come in?* I was standing in line at our café, so forever I'll remember the rapid pinball talk of workers manoeuvring through conversations and wit—coffee-bean aroma punctuating the air. I can see my hand pay for my blueberry muffin. *Of course, I can be there in twenty.* Wasn't I supposed to be sitting down? Not waiting in a space I often ate my sautéed mushrooms on toast?

ii. MRI

My head face down as the MRI is clanking away. Trying to count to one-hundred, or see myself floating in space—looking down at an Earthrise or imagine the Horsehead Nebula with its delicate folds of gas, cantering across space. But I think of Jocelyn Bell Burnell using radio waves to discover pulsars, how she interpreted composition, structure and motion. These magnetic fields and radio waves now assessing me. My breast images are lit up with stellar jets from hypernova. At least, that's what I deduce.

iii. Surgery Viscosity

Debris of cuts. Pieces missing. Flattened and tied up. My skin abrading. I'm shedding. Displaced. On heavy medication, I can't even manage the thumbs to text friends but I order two pairs of zebra print shoes in the right size. I think a ship has passed my window on the second Floor. All memories ripple, one universe, sideswipes another. Relief, as colossal as Jupiter.

iv. Radiotherapy

Breath hold. So they don't radiate your heart. Strapped in with arms above your head. Micro movements so every angle is exact. Each morning at 8, Changing Room A. Same room, same gown, same footsteps. Consistency means you don't have to remember each day as a new experience. Erasure, evanescence. High-energy X-rays, protons, particles passing through with the buzz of stop/start/stop/start. A sluggish labyrinth, waiting to finish. The metrical beat of marking the calendar. Hold breath. Release.

v. After

How long is after? How far, the future? I dash to a boat halting above cavernous Phthalo blue patches of ocean. Irrepressible winds disrobing our hair. All the while laughing. Some days are like that. Some, just sitting in the kitchen with a book. We are colliding minds on this small planet. Our humbling molten existence. Our eyes, full of the Rosette Nebula or the magnitude of space. Our minds, often in the needlework of living, hurtling rapidly towards the end.

Alicia Sometimes is an Australian poet and broadcaster. She has performed her spoken word and poetry at many venues, festivals and events around the world. She is director and co-writer of the science-poetry planetarium shows, *Elemental* and *Particle/Wave*. In 2020, Sometimes won the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize and in 2021 completed the Boyd Garret residency for the City of Melbourne and a Virtual Writer in Residency for Manchester City of Literature and Manchester Literature Festival.