

My Patient

Ruth Cohen, MD

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Nancy, you're gone.
 No more red hair with brown roots.
 No more tongue piercing.
 When you stuck out your tongue
 it read, Eat Me.
 You said it was a joke.
 Nancy with the wide open heart
 and its clicking mechanical valve.
 For one session we met
 after your kidney dialysis;
 we sat on a bench and schmoozed,
 two friends, one of them
 your psychiatrist.

You spent five months in the hospital
 with multisystem failure
 and finally infection and sepsis.
 You said, "I'm too young to die."
 At 46 you were right.
 And when I asked,
 "What do you think will happen?"
 you said—correctly—"I will die,"
 leaving behind your mother
 three children, one grandchild,
 and friends and me.

Baby Talk

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I rest my hip day and night,
 osteoarthritis.
 Like a baby I peer up
 at the mirror, the chandelier.
 The day passes.
 "Rest," my father used to say,
 "You need rest."
 But that was a time
 when I needed to rest my mind,
 and in turn my body.
 Now it is the swelling between bones
 pressing on flesh,
 inflaming the hip.

Sometimes sharp,
 the pain subsides
 when I rest my body,
 and, in turn, my mind.
 Rest, curl up or lie straight,
 anything to quell the pain
 of stepping and walking
 gently, tenderly,
 learning again to rest.