Rent(s) in the ego
46 (unchronological & imbalanced) incursions into self over 46 years

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Abstract
This is an extract from a full-length poetry collection, part of which was presented at Liminal: The Second Annual Critical Femininities Conference, August 2022.

Keywords
Feminized body, illness, feminist poetry
WOUND (1)
Gretel

Gretel (a GP) says it’s definitely
a spider bite,

(you think she could be
a little more sympathetic)

the angry red lump
behind your left knee,
the purple skin that
forms a neat square
where the poison spread,
not enough to kill a human
just enough to irritate one

(& you were trying to like spiders too,
come around to their mysterious beauty).

The mystery here is that you don’t
know when it happened—
at the country wedding,
on your couch,
in your bed?

A reminder that you can’t always
see the danger until the damage is done.
Louise Hay (an author) says problems on the left side are about the feminine,

your emotional self & memories

—what you carry with you

that kind of thing

(in her book: You can Heal Your Life).

The back of your body is your private self things you don’t want to deal with & don’t want others to see.

So the front, your front, is how you front up, what you take out in the world with you each day.

Legs are how you move forward in life, they store trauma & resentment

family wounds & jealousies: spider bite, stiff big toe, weird hip grind

(will I be okay)

(is there enough to support me)?

Cancer may be a secret deep inside, guilt or anger eating away at you

& in the breast reveals a lack of nurturing

(how do you treat others)

(how do you treat yourself)?

You are not 100% sure about self-help, horoscopes, therapy or tarot but you devour them all in a relentless pursuit of—
Katrina

Katrina (a breast surgeon) says the reason you got cancer is because your body produces oestrogen & you have breasts.

She’ll brook no talk of body blame:

- it’s because you didn’t have children
- it’s because your bras were too tight
- it’s because you ate chicken
- it’s because you didn’t exercise enough
- it’s because you live in the west
- it’s because you work all day at a computer screen
- it’s because you’re unhappy in yourself.

She works every day with real women who live (with) & die from this disease.

She tells you the scar is healing beautifully.

She says in a year or two it will just be a memory

& life will keep taking you further & further away.

(You imagine you will die from this disease, one day— maybe many years from now— everybody has to die from something).
Sim

Beautiful Sim (a friend) said:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & \text{don’t use the word journey} \\
  & \text{don’t ever wear tracksuits to chemo} \\
  & \text{if you’re bold enough go bald}
\end{align*}
\]

Sim texted the night after your first chemo. She was thinking of you—sweet girl.

You talked about treatment & much worse than people being awkward was when they were silent.

When she died, it was her you wanted to tell:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & \text{Sim has died} \\
  & \text{I’m so sad}
\end{align*}
\]

Her page stayed on Facebook for a while, would come up in your friends list & memories.

Then one day it stopped. Her husband—or someone—must have closed it down.
Frances

Frances (an oncologist) says yes once you’ve had it, it’s likely to come back, that’s why they recommend the treatment.
E

E (a therapist) says: *Common things are common*
when you bring up new pains, strange bleeds

& other bodily things in the
months after diagnosis,

& really, you are
not the worrying kind when it
comes to this.

Eat a pill each day,
live as best you can, the rest of it
is outside your control.

No, it’s not cancer that
you circle back to again,
& again
& again

in the white room
with the black couch.
It’s that other thing.

How to talk about it.
How to write about it.

.you are drawn to disappointment
.you place yourself at the margins
.you find allure in rejection

How to give word shape to
the fundamental story
that is you

(he suggests you write about
your relationship with writing,
the dance between acceptance
& rejection, the strange, familiar
pain of it—can you)?
David another oncologist

David another oncologist says
the chemotherapy switched them off,

  making my ovaries sound almost accidental.
  A part of my chemistry now at the whim of medical machinations,
  working the endocrine system as front defensive line
  against the cancer that snuck in.

Said so casually, light words like acid rain, burning tiny holes in roof and eaves,
exposing me to the elements:

  this building, one day, will fall.
Author Biography

Emilie Collyer lives in Australia on unceded Wurundjeri Country. Her writing is published and produced widely. Her poetry collection *Do you have anything less domestic?* (Vagabond Press 2022) won the inaugural Five Islands Press Prize. Her plays have won and been nominated for multiple awards including Theatre503 International Playwriting (London), Patrick White, Green Room and Malcolm Roberston. Emilie is a PhD candidate at RMIT (Naarm/Melbourne) where she is researching feminist creative practice.