

## **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 (I)**

## 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

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:

*don't use the word journey  
don't ever wear tracksuits to chemo  
if you're bold enough go bald*

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:

*Sim has died  
I'm so sad*

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.