

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.