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## Aggressive Breast Cancer Treatment and Recovery

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### Abecedary of Chemotherapy

after Laura Kolbe

Anticoagulants flow first, clearing the way.  
Blood return lets them know veins are ready.  
Chemotherapy hopefully kills the cancer.  
Digestive cells die, and  
epidermal layers, also hair  
follicles, although that is later.  
Gas builds and you burp,  
heartburn flares, worse than the worst  
indigestion, like something  
jamming your chest,  
knocking against the heart,  
lungs heavy and tight.  
Memory is lost, the mind  
numbed by endless nausea.  
Oral hygiene might prevent  
painful pustules in the mouth that make you  
question your food choices.  
Remember your last full meal?  
Stay home during your nadir, safe from germs,  
tiny terrorists of your now fragile,  
unreactive immune system.  
Victim of increasing fatigue, you  
watch the world move on, enduring each infusion,  
x-ing events out of your calendar, each day  
yearning for certainty, for confirmation of shrinkage,  
zero-sum game odds, for the win.

## To My Chest Muscles, for Defending Against an Implantable Port, One Year Later

I can feel the armor you have built,  
or maybe it's a weapon, a stout club  
to beat the surgeon's knife,  
to resist and smash the next port  
instead of bleeding into the hole,  
filling the cavity until the box  
floats, my chest ballooning into pain.  
You lost that battle, blood drained,  
artery sewn closed,  
port secured and ready  
to connect needles with veins.

Still rebelling, you allowed  
healing fibers to grow and block  
access, you shifted the box,  
lower, to the right,  
let the flexible base bunch up  
at the edge, anything to save me  
from chemotherapy,  
immunotherapy,  
steroids, anti-nausea meds,  
from anticoagulants,  
antihistamines,  
and electrolytes,  
especially magnesium,  
because who wants  
all that dripping slowly  
into the heart,  
destroying blood and guts,  
forcing kidneys into overdrive,  
inflaming liver,  
for a chance?

Because one year later,  
port six months removed,  
I find your knot under skin  
and wonder: is this a new tumor,  
or simply another scar?

## Found: Patient Reminder

Thank for screening.	you choosing	At age forty, discuss
Records  mammogram.	risk, indicate routine	breast health.
Breast  easier	cancer	If you  already, disregard.

## About the Poet

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