

Digging in the Dirt

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I stood on the precipice
Staring down at the Blackhand sandstone
At the rocks and water splashing to the ground
It was high up, the rocky ledge
And I stood there
Looking past the edge

She died a month before
Cancer racing through her body
Like RC cars on an electric track, swirling
Like marbles shaken in a human-shaped bag
It filled her thick as the smoke she devoured
Since she was thirteen until she was thirty-nine

Live to see Christmas
Till Christmas, the labcoats said
At the most at the least no one could be certain
But as of July we knew death would draw back her curtain
Eventually the cancer began to drift through her body
Like a Portuguese man-o-war floating in the sea

Just like me, we're twins you and I
Look just alike up top don't we, the baldman said
She doesn't want to draw attention to herself
A wheelchair topped with a cap of a garish color
I look into the camera with my arm around her shoulder
My skin bronzed by the sand, sea and sun of Cancun

Two fist-sized time bombs nestled inside her head
Right rear and rear right, the labcoats said
Ten benign spots like freckles on her brain
The larger two untouchable for the sake of the ten
Oxygen to a tumor is like a bat to a melon:
Split it open and the seeds go everywhere

Forks holding cigarettes, so many
Like a nicotine salad
Shaking in addled hands to calm severed nerves
Tries to quit; the gum is utterly useless
The cancer sticks calm her, the damaged goods says
Her motor nerves have not been informed

The smell chokes me
I abhor it
It is a part of her, so I abhor her
For not allowing me another smell to remind me of who she was
I am told she wears lavender oil
I cannot tell under the mask of poison gas

The labcoat who responds to the first case is a bad man
Doctor Frankenstein is a more appropriate title
Than what his parents gave him
Stitching her skin, her breasts
With no finesse
His handiwork left her monstrous

Metal bars line the hallway to build her strength
She could walk again, the lab coats said
The bars were better utilized by myself in my youth
Than her, the broken doll
She could walk again if she tried
She didn't try, she just asked for a light

Motor skills and depth perception were damaged
Too many stairs not enough ramps
Accessibility hindered, shaking voice, shaking hands
She was stubborn and got where she wanted
She dressed as a pirate a few times since then

She already had an eye patch and the wheels may as well been peg-legs

The good labcoat did few before her success
It was a risky prospect then, cutting open a head
Slicing the meninges and peeling it away
To pull out the grey pie piece
Like the overly ripe spots on an apple
Or another, brain-shaped piece of fruit

She fell on the way to the car
Heading to the hospital
On the front steps
He carries her in his arms and there's shouting
I remember it clearly which is impossible
I was asleep in my bed the night of her aneurysm

Four days earlier she draws the Ghostbuster emblem
For her son's fourth birthday—his hero is Bill Murray
They play "Pin the Tongue on the Ghost" with that picture
He loves his proton pack and is careful not to cross streams
They are poor but happy and he is naïve, young, a child
What a difference the passage of a few days can make

All things terrestrial to dust, all things terrestrial to four.

All before he has a care in the world, the mutant boy
Perfectly happy and digging in the dirt.
She and he watch with a smile as he tosses a worm to them
And closes his eyes as they wrench it screaming onto the hook
He pretends it doesn't happen and counts out another four
Wriggling little things, never then to think how they are so very much alike.