

Negative Conditioning

by Veneta Masson, FNP

At first it was just the needles she hated
she had bad veins
and good instincts.
Then she began to hate her doctor
his face, set like an alarm clock,
his merciless attention to time.
In time, the sight of the fish tank in the waiting room made her sick
that queasy medium
those darting appraisals—piscine and human—
from the other side of the glass
and the elevator
sealing her off, in
before she had pushed the button
before she was ready
and the short walk from the parking lot
in spite of the glare
a fog of premonition
and the drive from home
no longer behind the wheel
no longer in control
even leaving the house
saying goodbye
shutting the door behind her
each time
a rehearsal.

Veneta Masson is a family nurse practitioner and writer living in Washington, DC. About this poem, Masson says, "When my sister Rebecca was struggling with breast cancer, she asked me to put a poem about our experience in my next book. She said poems 'say some of the hard things I don't have it in me to say.' Rebecca died in 1997. The 'poem about our experience' is turning into a book of its own."

Ms. Masson is the author of two books, Rehab at the Florida Avenue Grill (poetry, Sage Femme Press, 1999) and Ninth Street Notebook: Voice of a Nurse in the City (reflections on her work in inner-city Washington, DC, Sage Femme Press, 2001).

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