

Scarred for Life

Lori D Roadhouse

I was sixteen
when she showed me the scars

Careless stitches
by thoughtless doctor
it looked as though
she'd run a race with Time
and the finish line
was made of barbed wire

Double mastectomy
left her chest concave
like a young boy's
only no nipples
no womanness
no humanness
really

I spent the next decade
checking my breasts daily
freaking out at
every lump and bump
every twinge
growing pains
making me shrink from Life
sending me to doctor after doctor
(speaking of shrinks
I should have taken care of that
much sooner)
scared of Life
Scarred for life

Spent my youth terrified
of Death
too little living
too much worrying
Cancer consumed me
and I didn't even have
a diagnosis
just the certainty
the overwhelming
dread and doom

Made me old before my time
misspent youth
wasted childhood
preoccupied with Death and
dying
thoughts only the old
should ever entertain

I left
ran away from Life
to a third world country
where it was impossible
to feel sorry
for myself
amid the poverty and destitu-
tion
yet I could plainly see
those people were happy
Happy!

She sent me letters
told me she was living vicari-
ously
through my travels
that she'd always wanted to
see the world
and I had brought it
closer to her
Said my words and photos
took her places she'd only
dreamed of
places she knew she'd never get
to
now

She died
a month before I came home

A year later
on her birthday
I was in the NICU
pumping breast milk
for newborn
twin daughters
born two months early
daughters for whom
my breasts were
the source of Life

Even now
I reread those letters often
Her words resonate with
me
make me weep for her
for the years I'd wasted
on dying
when I had the luxury of
living

I was old before I was
young
Death brought me to Life
and now
I am the child
I never was

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