The Prairie Light Review

Volume 18
Number 2 Horizons

Spring 5-1-1998

The Cancer Store

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College of DuPage

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol18/iss2/18

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A once virile husband takes small mincing steps on bruised purple legs.
Push the metal walker away then
Stop.
It hurts.
Through tightened blue lips breathe out slowly.
Dead already and your wife knows it.
Exhausted old man.

A weary young woman wears a pensive frown,
Cancer chic turban.
Push the baby carriage away then
Stop.
It hurts.
Something new and sudden grows within.
Brave smile for a hopeful family.
Trusting doomed mother.

A quiet little boy wrapped in mother’s arms.
Book lays lap unread.
Push Winnie the Pooh away then
Stop.
It hurts.
Stocking cap covers up lymph node sins.
No eyebrows and a chemo crewcut.
Silent small soldier.

“Only three more treatments.
They think they have it all.”
They never have it all!
It lurks in the night like
A multi-celled mugger wanting your wallet and your white cells.

Have the good graces to let us
Pull the covers over your heads and let you
Die at home.
Stop reminding us the grim reaper drives a Porsche these days.
Ninety miles an hour.
Down the expressway.
To your door.
Maybe he’ll get lost or get a flat.
Knock-knock.

Oncology at the cancer store.
Move patients like ashen pawns over pale blue and white squares into gray waiting rooms full of busy medicos and false hopes.
Checkmate.

Radiation.
Remission.
Chemotherapy.
Oncology.
The cruelest hoax.

— Gerald Ryan