

NOT QUITE A CHEVRON

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We find togetherness
in sordid pictures.
It looks more like a peace symbol,
my mother says,
arguing with my father—or as usual,
agreeing at the top
of her lungs—
about his transplant scar.
It’s supposed to be a chevron,
he insists, brandishing the skin
shot full of staples.

I agree with my mother.
Of course—
or perhaps not—
I often do. These things
are complicated like the reasons
I could never be a match.
Left censoring *cystic fibrosis*
from lists of disqualifiers
for liver transplantation
takes a certain art.

The person who made me
may not have used a brush
but certainly
there was a cup.
Made me so my father
could be just that, and then—
much later, a lifetime of much later—
hear my desperate words.

A plea, two publications.
Tears that rolled unseen
down my cheeks.
I knew that story well;
one day I may argue
over chevrons of my own.
For now my scars
are all inside:
thickened tubes, blocked passages,
dark places filled with grime.
Small clocks, ticking away.

I had a lifetime
of acclimating,
of growing accustomed
to what feels normal
when nothing
really is.
Suddenly, there was so little
time for anything.

And then, the call—
or two, because my father
was swimming.
Strange to others how
we can be at once
sick and well.
Within one person,
multitudes.
I know you understand, he said
when last I saw him
with original parts.

My father opened himself
and scalpels opened him
to put life back inside.
Messages came like
cryptic warnings.
21 tubes, 23 tubes—then silence.
And then my mother,
in the small hours:
Liver is already producing bile.

Nouns as communication
all that next day:
Physiotherapy. Solids. Sitting. Walking.
Drains, pumps, catheters. Pain.
Unmentioned, but hovering:
Elation, relief, hope.
I breathed deep in my
infected lungs,
gave thanks.

It may be months until I see him.
The danger within me
looms too great, and even
between family, some things
should not be shared.
Yet those same perils
let me reach past fears
to the hope chest within,
where scalpels cannot go.
I fill my own with patience
and a short familiar checklist:
masks, wipes, nitriles.
In time, I will need them.

For now, I have the pictures
and the arguments
and the pricking tears
of having made some difference.
Not quite a guardian angel—
too little dead to qualify—
but something.
I love you and your words, he says.
This time, they were enough.

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