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The author's address is:

186 Jerry Browne Road #5416
 Mystic, Connecticut 06355
 E-mail: martinsetpoint@yahoo.com

The weight of a marble

I should have known something was wrong when she told me to call between five and seven p.m. on Friday, when she didn't pick up on the second ring, when she didn't ask about my exam.

"I went in for my MRI on Wednesday," she says, and suddenly I know.

"It's the right breast this time," she says, and I'm clicking through the words in my head like flashcards—
 tamoxifen
 letrozole
 anastrozole
 metastasis
 metastasis
 metastasis

I think of the jelly bean-lymph nodes I plucked from a cadaver last year;
 I wonder if my mom's are the same or if they're already heavy as marbles with cells dividing uncontrollably.

Maybe if I had gotten that question right on the exam this morning, maybe if I had studied harder—was it raloxifene or exemestane for a fifty-eight-year-old post-menopausal woman with two sisters one mother one daughter and a tamoxifen-resistant tumor?

Maybe if I had listened when she asked me not to move away, I would have known.

Instead, I sat a thousand miles away, staring blindly into a microscope at slides of cancer cells, at their mitotic chromosomes splayed out like a skeleton's fingers and I didn't know that those same fingers were slowly growing, squeezing between fibrous tissue, and taking root again.

Alyse Marie Carlson

Ms. Carlson is a member of the Class of 2016 at University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine. This poem won second place in the 2014 *Pharos* Student Poetry Competition. Ms. Carlson's e-mail address is: alyse-carlson@uiowa.edu.
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