Editor's Note: The poet writes, “I became interested in how literature can clarify the anxiety patients feel in medical settings, (for me personally, anxiety is compounded by the fear of not being listened to).” She teaches literature and composition at the University of Georgia.

ELDER SONG

I bore true blood in battle
though my breath came quick
and poorly; kept silent
while a needle’s sting
attacked my marrow
sorely. Suffered anonymity,
waiting for reports; then swore
upon my fainting heart
to take my name again:
to carry true blood singing,
secret and alone,
and release the captive
language tuning in the bone.

Jane Marston, PhD
Athens, GA

Returning to Practice

February, after lunch. Every chief complaint
includes aches and sore throat. Nine
women. Two men. Deep lined faces seek
relief in this familiar space with blue
countertops. Three exam rooms, ordered
exactly, labels on drawers and doors.

I can’t find the correct swab I need
in this pile of white-tipped applicators:
compressed foam for viral cultures,
difficult-to-open rayon heads for strep,
and so on. I can’t catch a rhythm. It’s like
cooking dinner in someone else’s kitchen.

Between patients, one of the nurses tells
me about her trip to Mayo. She starts chemo
next week. Stethoscope thumps gawkly against
my chest without breasts to damper the bumps.

Molly L. O’Dell, MD, MFA
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