**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 gawky against
my chest without breasts to damper the bumps.

Molly L. O’Dell, MD, MFA
Christiansburg, VA

**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.

**Editor’s Note:** Dr O’Dell writes that “The experience of stepping
back into the familiar rhythm of practice with the camaraderie
of staff after the transformation from my mastectomies was surreal.
I was me yet different from the person who used to inhabit these
rooms.” She is a public health officer for the Virginia Department
of Health, practicing in the New River Valley of southwest
Virginia. She received her MFA from the University of Nebraska
in 2008.