Editor's Note: The author writes, “On one hand, receiving a diagnosis after a long period of not knowing what is physically wrong is helpful. At the same time, this does not necessarily make it any easier to live with on a day to day basis.”

AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

Aluminum oars soundlessly slice
the tepid air and warm
sleek waters of the lake.

A pied-billed grebe swims nearby.
A thousand miles away in the dog-eared
pages of my grandfather’s Bible
St. Paul asks, “Do you not know
your body is a temple?”

Long before Paul, the temple
of the Israelites was pillaged, plundered,
and destroyed. There
God dwelled among the ruins.

What I know for certain is
my arms have grown tired
from rowing.

I know the body of the grebe
is small and brown
with black chin and black ring
around his chicken-like ivory bill,
and the flock to which it belongs
will migrate soon leaving the sick
and maimed behind.

I know it is late in the season
and the mule-deer foraging on shore
finds most woody vegetation gone,

that the mule-deer’s stiff-legged jump startles the grebe
and like a submarine it sinks
below the surface,

that a grebe can remain
submerged longer than most
water fowl. I know it will surface
from the dark warm waters
when the danger has passed.

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Editor's note for authors of submissions to Pectoriloquy: Poems should not exceed 350 words, should not have been previously published, and should be related to concerns of physicians and medicine. First submissions to the Pectoriloquy Section should be submitted via e-mail to poetrychest@aol.com. Authors of accepted poems will be asked to submit the final version to CHEST Manuscript Central.
—Michael Zack, MD, FCCP

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