

TAROT CARDS

By Johanna Shapiro

All of a sudden in my life
The news is never good
We've found a mass
It could be cancer
You need surgery
It is cancer
It could be fatal
Sorry, it is an orphan cancer
No one knows much about it
We think it is too big
To just watch and wait
We can try this approach
But there's no proof it works
You'll probably have
Recurrences
Maybe more surgeries
If you're lucky
We save radiation
And chemo
To the last
Because they're not
All that effective

I think of myself
As a scientist
I've been trained to believe in
Numbers, data, evidence
But in their absence
In a world of bad news
I now read my
Fortune cookies
With more care
I pay attention
When friends dream
They see me healed and whole

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I scan the papers
For improbable happy endings
And when my 85-year-old mother

Reads the tarot cards for me
And pronounces them
Just beautiful, not a single
Black card among them,
I am consoled

STATISTICS

By Johanna Shapiro

As a scientist,
when I first became ill,
I obsessively asked my doctors
for the numbers:
What is the survival rate
at two years? Five years?
How many
are alive
10 years out?
The doctors gave me numbers:
80 percent, 30 percent, 65 percent, 72 percent, 20 percent.
I was possessed
by the statistics.
Maybe this study is newer,
maybe the treatment approach differed,
maybe this sample was contaminated.
No matter the number,
I kept asking.

Then one day
I found the perfect answer,
the one true answer
heavier than lead,
lighter than air,
more precious than gold.

Sitting in the office
of the sarcoma specialist
in a moment of grace,
I gazed past the doctor
toward his kind-faced nurse.
Tell me, Susan, I said,
Is there a chance
I will dance
at my grandson's
bar mitzvah?

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Her eyes perfectly
untroubled
gazed back.

Life is so
unpredictable, she said.
Go buy a dress.