

JERRY WILLIAMS

Love and Oncology

When my mother got cancer
I thought of an old Polaroid I'd found
in her dresser drawer when I was twelve.
She was standing in front of a white wall
in her bra and panties (like a hostage).
When my mother got cancer
I hoped she might lose some weight
but she's the Belle of Appalachia.
When my mother got cancer
I sat on my bathroom floor
in bitchy Rhode Island and diffracted.
I guilted a neighbor into feeding my fish
and caught a flight to Tennessee.
When my mother got cancer
I put my hand on her back
and whispered something tribal into her ear.
When my mother got cancer
I blamed coal, I blamed straight pipes
pumping human waste into rivers—
because if I didn't I would always hear that ticking.
When my mother got cancer
the nomenclature was excruciating:
incision, J-pouch, temporary colostomy,
napalm, Agent Orange.
When my mother got cancer
there was no more mention of treadmills
or trips out west or too many pain pills.
When my mother got cancer
I let a doctor stick his finger up my ass
and gamely set a date for the fiber-optic snake.
When my mother got cancer
I tried to put it out of my mind.
I went to bars and got drunk and started

arguments with the unemployed about unions.
When my mother got cancer
I swear it was true love.
The world fit perfectly into a powdered latex glove.