

Lumbar Puncture

I laugh while they do the puncture,
keeping up a steady stream of one-liners:
“Whiskey is my preferred pain killer” and
“don’t worry, if it hurts, you’ll know--
The whole place will know.”
I’m good at entertaining.

Relax, the doctor says.
Chris, the nurse, has her hands on me. They are warm.
I think of my dog at the vet’s, her eyes darting, frantic.
I am all animal, knees to chest.
The doctor counts my vertebrae.
I think of spare ribs, I think
of making a joke.

Chris shows me the four vials of spinal fluid.
Clear, like water,
but full of meaning some bio-magician will decipher,
predicting my future:
a gradual loss of muscle control,
wheelchairs, and being fed
like a child, or not—
just some anomaly in the brain,
this shadow, this lesion.

My husband reads an article, “The End of Physics?”
I glance at it, eyes glazing.
The world is full of mysteries
I do not understand.
I understand his passion,
but I don’t care
where the atoms are in the box.
Do you feel the energy? my PT says, and
I do. I feel the colors of my chakras;
sunlight makes sense to me,
dogs wrestling in it.

The part of my brain with the shadow on it
houses memory, language, emotions,
each function a Tarot card waiting to be turned.
Will I learn to understand physics without them?

St. Augustine had a dream. In it a small boy
tried to empty the ocean into his bucket.

The dream, the saint said, was a metaphor
for trying to grasp God with our minds.

The world is full
of mysteries.

The world is full.

4/2010

2011 Hippocrates Prize commended poem