

# The Annunciation

## I. The Visit

A knock but no time  
to answer.

The doctor appears  
in a white coat.  
She beams.

“Rachel, Rachel,  
I have good news.  
You will be okay.  
You will be fine.  
You will survive  
this cancer. I promise.”

She has studied  
the pathology report,  
my personal history  
(a “poor historian,”  
some labeled me),  
my medical genealogy  
traced to my mother,  
grandmothers,  
great-grandmothers.

“Do not be afraid, Rachel.  
Do not fear this cancer.  
You need a hysterectomy,  
possibly light radiation,  
but you will be okay.”

“How can this be?”  
I ask, stunned, crouched  
on the examination bed,  
knowing the months  
I have bled.

I am a lucky woman.



## II. Rachel's Song

The bosses stole my livelihood,  
my dignity, my health insurance.  
Friends embraced me.  
I was not alone.

When cancer laid a trap  
for me, and death  
sat at a big desk  
as well as in my uterus,

the powerful punished me  
with denial of service  
and mountains of bills.

The people cried for justice.  
When I sought mercy,  
a payment plan,  
a loan with interest,  
or Medicaid coverage,  
bureaucrats mocked me,  
shrugged, shut their files.

The people rose up  
to defend me.

Friends, comrades,  
strangers, too,  
were advocates,  
benefactors.  
They buoyed me up.  
They lifted my spirits.

They helped me  
find nurses, a doctor;  
get medication;  
have surgery  
to save my life.

The people got over.  
They humbled the mighty.

—Rachel Jennings

## THE DEATH OF MY UTERUS: GIVING THANKS

Preparing me for surgery,  
the removal of uterus, ovaries,  
fallopian tubes, the doctor says  
my body will be vertical  
on the operating table,  
feet soaring above my head,  
arms strapped to sides,  
intestines pressing lungs.

Upside down! I imagine  
the Apostle Peter hanging  
by bleeding feet, spread-eagled  
like a butchered hog, so as not  
to mimic the death of Jesus.

Not I, however, but my uterus,  
as huge and awkward as Peter,  
will be crucified.

As for me, I do resemble Jesus  
in one regard: unmarried,  
childless, we have wandered  
a landscape of hills and caves,  
worlds exterior and interior,  
with an itinerary  
of our own making  
to share as we please  
parables, paradoxes,  
poems.

My uterus,  
traveling with me,  
has neither housed Jesus  
as has Mary's womb  
nor sheltered  
like a scroll jar

a single Jesus parable,  
being home, in fact, to none  
but a deadly tumor  
and fibroids the size  
of beef livers.

After surgery, I peer  
at four small punctures  
and a fierce gash  
in the expanse  
above my belly button.

Ain't I still a woman?

The life my crucified  
uterus gives me  
is my own.

—Rachel Jennings