



Illustration by Steve Derrick

The tent

I can't blame you. Then, well yes:
slow heat your passion, chest
bared to sun, you relegated the risk
to the void. I noticed a raised dot
over your heart, dark daisy center,
but you insisted just a blood blister.

Wrong. Two years, stage four melanoma
provided tickets: treks to specialists,
fortune tellers with medical dice --
the last scan, free of the white flag
of death. But now the drums stop.
Your back hurts. Badly. Like an elephant
fallen from its platform, the crowd
in hushed astonishment, star of the show

down. You parade a litany of causes:
too long in a hard chair, the flimsy cot
one night, worst case -- slipped disc.
No problem. Wrong again.
No magician with disappearing
cards, no ace of spades tucked in a sleeve,
chiropracty's tourniquet hands.
No opioid meds to swallow like flame.

Loudspeaker blaring, the MRI announces
bone infection, two vertebrae consumed.
The flagged tent, folding. Nothing
you did—simply a tooth ache, sore toe,
paper cut—something small
and forgettable found a capillary
to immortality, plugged it shut,
infected your heart.

Here we go again, circus rounds
of specialists, high-wire surgeries,
clown-juggling drugs. But this time,
this time, dreams encased in abscess,
I can't even say I told you so.

— Carol Barrett, PhD

Dr. Barrett is Professor, PhD Program in
Interdisciplinary Studies, Union Institute & University,
Cincinnati, OH and Coordinator of Creative Writing
Certificate Program; Adjunct Faculty in Creativity
Studies, Saybrook University, Pasadena, CA. Her
E-mail address is carol.barrett@myunion.edu.