

A case of Zoster



It all started with an ache

And with symptoms protean, weird

- An enervating malaise
- A fever mild, inexplicable
- Migratory twinges of pain, defying localization
- Joints aching, muscles weakening, soul darkening

Atavistic medical-student reflexes were triggered:

Could this be cardiac ischemia?

Or mesenteric thrombosis; or an ulcer about to perforate?

And then the rash emerged, bringing an end to ambiguity

and with it, an awareness of stupidity and denial:

("I had this decades ago; it won't happen again.")

("Shingrix - it's on my to-do list, you know!")

The eruption pathognomonic, its description sonorous:

"Grouped vesicles on an erythematous base,"

The angry thoracic dermatome, a Memento mori
of neuroanatomic verities

There followed weeks of lassitude, ennui, self-absorption

And pain—superficial but also deep

Intimating something visceral, enteric—but what?

And finally, a convalescence, glacially slow,

The eruption once angry, mottled, repugnant

Now crusted, discontinuous, eventually indistinct

And in its wake, a little symphony of pains

of infinite qualities and shades—

Playing out in a damaged concert hall,

A twinge here, a tickle there,

Crawling ants, and an occasional electric shock

And the name itself—shingles...

Building materials? Signboards?

How curious!

—Myron D. Ginsberg, MD

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