**Scars**

Elisabeth Harrahy

My 9-year old asks one morning

if I have any scars

I show her the thick white V on my knee

tell her how I fell from a playground spring horse

onto concrete

and the one on my ring finger

where a flap opened up to the broken glass

under soapy dish water

demonstrating how high the blood squirted

after nicking the artery

I gently trace over the one

where I sliced open my palm

on purpose in a fit

but say nothing

Then

after a moment’s hesitation

I open the top of my nightgown

to show her the two scars on my right breast

one like a narrow worm spooning the nipple

the other a centipede alone

tell her there were five lumps

all benign

meaning, not cancer

“Do you have any other scars?”

“Well. No more like these.”

“What other kinds are there?”

And in a flash, I am reminded of

The burn of watching supposed new friends

who promised to take me trick-or-treating

run past my window

where I stood waiting

itchy in my cowardly lion costume

The fear of losing my mother

after my best friend lost hers

to an unexpected aneurism

the sirens of her ambulance waking me

in the middle of the night

The shame of hearing my grandmother yell

“I am not your coolie!” for leaving her

to walk home slowly behind

me and some cute boy from church

My inability to withstand

something simple as a turtleneck

against my throat

remnant of being choked

while bent backward over a car

The constant need

to check the bathroom window

before getting in the shower

half expecting to see some strange

man’s face there

having caught one before

The omnipresent underlying

dread all twisted up with

newfound appreciation

for each and every day

following blood tests

that indicate someday

my body may turn to stone

But I cover myself back up

look at her with a smile

and say, “Oh.

There are no other kinds.”

Because I do not want to be

the first to cut her

with worry

That unwelcome companion

that haunts

and leaves an invisible

mark