

ISSUE 3

SUBURBAN WITCHCRAFT

Art & literature

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VOX Art // James Diaz // Mirjana M. // Sadee Brekke // L. M. Cole //
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PHOTOGRAPHY by

Hazel J. Hall // Mirjana M. // Thorsten Dettlaff

brought together by the EDITOR IN CHIEF Mirjana M.



"Anywhere", by Mirjana M.

The Girl in the Corner

My mother was in the room with me, morning to evening, in the weeks following my open-head surgery. I'd had a tumor removed, one we discovered I'd had since birth.

I know what you're thinking. It sounds implausible to hear that someone lived with a brain tumor their whole life—in my case, 40 years—but, I'm proof it can happen. Born with it, it now makes sense why I limped since childhood. Why my eye crossed overnight at age four. Why I developed nonstop hiccupping, dry-heaved bile, had a left foot and calf that felt like ice. My tumor was classified a cavernous angioma. It was on my brain stem, the three-inch long, tube-shaped mass of nervous tissue that controls breathing. Heartbeat. Consciousness.

Complicating matters, it bled.

That was the bad news. The good news is that my doctor, Chief of Neurosurgery at a Boston hospital and lecturer at Harvard Medical School, removed my tumor in a daylong operation. While recovering at the hospital, and later at a brain injury rehabilitation center through the month of October—where I re-learned how to swallow and progressed from a wheelchair, to a walker, to a cane—my mother left only when visiting hours ended. I got used to waking and seeing her, reassuring me from her chair.

One time I woke and she wasn't there. I lifted my head as another headache slammed my temple. I scanned the room. Empty. Soon though, I saw people congregating at the door and spilling across the threshold. I couldn't see their features and no one spoke to me. Their laughter rose. Music started, a rush of thumping chords. I called out that I was trying to sleep. No one listened, nor looked at me. I closed my eyes and pulled in a deep breath. I'd need to yell. When I opened my eyes again, the room was empty. The lights, dimmed.

I saw movement in a corner. Was Mom back? I looked again. That person didn't move like my mother. I peered, but shut my eyes when fear knifed my gut. I wanted the crowd of people back. I peeked again. The figure was rocking in a chair, back and forth, back and forth. I squeezed my eyes shut as pins pricked my arms and scalp. I looked again and she stared back, a young girl with a pale face. She had large eyes, dark-circled and mournful. She wore a shawl, and seemed plucked from the pages of a Victorian novel. I looked away. And back. She was gone.

When I woke again, it was morning. Mom was sitting in her usual place, in a chair by my bedside. I told her about the girl. She said I'd been in extreme pain the previous day and had been given Percocet. I should mention that months earlier, I'd named my tumor "Angie," an abbreviation for angioma. The nickname made what I had sound less clinical. I could fight something named Angie.

Had Percocet caused my hallucination, I wondered? Or, had I empowered the angioma by naming it, by giving “her” an identity—the tumor I’d lived with all my life? Could my tumor stare back, outside of me?

Angie was no longer in my brain but I believe she was with me, still, in the room that dark autumn night, deep into the season of the witch. It was she, my tumor, incarnate. This I believe.

This flash scene is excerpted from a completed memoir manuscript that

Ann Kathryn Kelly

is currently querying. It seems fitting to include it in our autumn issue, especially as Ann makes reference to the season of the witch.

Under the working title of OUTLASTING ANGIE, Ann’s memoir is a story about a diagnosis 40 years in the making. It’s a story of duality—two forces in one body, battling for dominance. It’s about control versus helplessness, how quickly independence can be taken, and how loved ones are as vital as medical specialists in saving us. In the end, she does outlast Angie. Yet, 40 years with her brain tumor brings an awareness that independence and life’s trajectory always did, and continues to, balance on a thin edge of what is inside and outside of anyone’s control.

Ann Kathryn Kelly writes from New Hampshire’s Seacoast region. She’s an editor with Barren Magazine, a columnist with WOW! Women on Writing, and she works in the technology sector. Ann leads writing workshops for a nonprofit that offers therapeutic arts programming to people living with brain injury. Her writing has appeared in a number of literary journals. <https://annkelly.com/>