

Mountain Pose

by Linda Simoni-Wastila

He stood on his porch and breathed in, long and full. Behind his ribcage, on the left, a twinge. He acknowledged the pain and bid it away with his exhalation. Sun filtered through leaves, dappling him in light and shadow. He focused on the red bird in the hedgerow. He raised his left foot into the cleft above his knee. Breathe in. *I will beat this.* Breathe out. *Bad energy.* He balanced on his right leg, a statue. A flurry of wings. He remembered the needle sticks, the crimson-filled vials, and wobbled in the small breeze.

Lying in the dewy grass in corpse pose, the stars of heaven above him, it was hard not to let worries take over his breath. He thought most of the burdens on his wife and teenage daughter. He thought of his yoga students missing class, of no longer learning at the feet of his guru. He itemized unfinished projects. The moon rose over the tree line, a huge white ghost, the air so clear he discerned craters and mountains. He focused on the largest indent and breathed but the holes in the moon reminded him not of a face but of lacunae, the holes in his body left behind by marauding white blood cells that multiplied and multiplied until they conquered the red cells and built their own fortresses, lemon-sized lumps circling his kidney. His breath leaked out and he bolted up with a choking sound.

After the surgery he slept, his body too weak for anything else. People fluttered in and out of his room, angel shadows leaving fingerprints on his forehead, his cheek, the top of his hand. He remembered what he taught his students, to breathe out bad and breathe in good, and he surrendered to his breath. On each inhale he imagined golden sunshine flooding his bloodstream, his organs, his muscle and bone, then pushing dead cells and other debris through his lungs and pores on each exhale. Days passed. He breathed gentle arpeggios and dreamt of standing in a glade of redwoods, birds circling his head, mountains towering above the treetops. Fingertips tented in prayer position, he raised his hands over his head, feet rooted to the earth, and breathed.

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