**mastectomy**

The oak tree in our backyard

had always seemed sturdy and

unshakeable, its roots planted further in the ground

than you ever could when planting your feet in stubbornness.

We were so caught up with tracing how far down its

roots traveled that we failed to notice the frailty of

the roughened bark curling around the trunk.

We neglected to observe that the spirograph of branches

were devoid of the usual chlorophyll green,

even amongst the sticky July afternoons

When the landscapers came that August,

they spared no mercy.

They perched like vultures as

they sawed away at the upper limbs.

Then came the buzzing of their chainsaw

as they amputated the

gargantuan stem of the tree,

until only a stump remained.

They couldn’t get to the roots though,

couldn’t dig deep enough to displace

those anchors still desperately clinging to life.

I watched as they fed

the trunk and branches through

the jaws of their wood chipper machine,

watched as our oak became nothing more

than flooring for

a children’s playground.

I think this is what they mean to do to

your body. They mean to cut away at the part of you

that makes you female.

The part of you that you’ve never really

cared about until it was threatened.

You watch the tree being cut down then

trace your fingers

down the seams of your body

and they feel weak. Like they

have been lazily stitched together

on your grandmother’s barely functional sewing machine.

Even though you know your body is pieced together with

tendons and muscles stronger than even

the most stalwart of branches,

there is still fear that you will never be whole again.

They say the carcinoma has already burrowed

underneath your skin.

He has taken up residence there.

Unpacked his bags,

laid his perfumes across the counter,

hung his coats up along

the insides of your ribcage.

He curls up in the flesh

where armpit meets chest,

takes his shoes off and settles in for a nap,

stretches his arms out,

nails scratching the inner surface of your breast,

feet stomping gracelessly across the curve

of your body.

Instead of electric saws

and woodchippers, they will come

at you with scissors and scalpels.

And it will feel like picking up your

seam ripper

to tear yourself apart,

even if you know it is only

so you can put yourself back

together again with stronger

stitching.

When you try to

tear yourself apart

to excise this invader,

your hand trembles.

You drop the seam ripper. Pick it up again.

Drop it. Pick it up. Drop it. Pick it up.

Drop it. Grasp it with both hands.

Even if you know cutting it out will save you,

it is hard to slice away at your own body.

Hard to watch a tree being cut down

and reduced to a stump,

even when you know

it’s diseased.