



BODY, BODY'S TORMENT, BODY'S REPRIEVE

We met over the trembling of your body, how could it not tremble?

Everyone, every week, succumbing.
But before they succumbed, flowers and presents for the nurses—
fountain pens, Valentino bags, Valentino sweaters,
his House, so decimated.

One night, in a N'oreaster, I took a car service from Jersey City
to find you hovering—the vancomycin wracking your
body,
rigors and chills, nausea and incontinence, you drenched the
sheets in sweat—
the good sheets that we'd gotten at ABC Carpet &
Home,
sheets for a bed good enough to die in, you'd said.

No meals for you, your sustenance in a back-pack dripped
into the large chest vein that led straight to your heart.
The fucking people you called friends then
squeezed you out of a Fire Island summer,
the one we all believed was to be your last
leaving you in your apartment facing the Chelsea Hotel.
No matter, friend. You did not die.
Miracle, one of a small number pulled back from the
abyss.

Leaning over your body, I dug 274 viral balls in one night
from your skin,
molluscum contagiosum, I used cuticle removers
to de-core the pearly center, your skin, broken, bled profusely—
we lifted ice to each spot—
nipples, back, belly, eyebrow, eyelids. Almost nothing left
for you, Body.



When Gavin came to take you to San Francisco, I taught him
the art of it
and you gave me the painting you always wanted me to have.
It is fifteen years since then, Body.

It is fifteen years since then, Body, old friend.
How you ever came back from that, to spray paint planters that
you fill with luscious orchids,
to build in the windows of your house a world of polar bears
and snow each
Christmas,
to manage all the friendships since then, beautifully,
the way a Body should.

Friend, I have never been asked again to sit with someone like
that.
But I would again, Body. I would again.

—Mary Jane Nealon