

852 Days

Your packet from admissions comes with a little something extra, tucked somewhere deep among the paperwork. Keep digging, it's in there somewhere. Ah yes, here it is, uncertainty. Compounded by medical jargon and people with more letters at the end of their name than were on your first grade report card. At first it's a prickle on the back of your neck, a lilt on the end of a sentence. Someone who knows how bodies work, knows something isn't right. Months later, when they finally utter the "c" word you expect it will vanish. Etiology, knowing the cause, should make the uncertainty go away. Instead, it expands, billowing outwards and filling the space left behind by exactly one hospital room full of sharp oxygen intake (a very precise measure). There are certainties- there will be no operation, the portal vein will slowly be occluded, metastases will deliberately turn organs into abdominal sludge. There will be falls in the night, plates of uneaten fried chicken, and Marsha from the front desk in interventional radiology will know you by name. The most absolute certainty is not discussed. Try making plans. Tickets for that concert before Christmas? Too uncertain. Graduation party for the youngest's high school graduation? Too uncertain. Quick stop by Dairy Queen after a full bag of gemcitabine? Too uncertain. Life is lived under the assumption that bodies will continue to function, and now they don't. Now take a deep breath, in and out, or don't. Death is an exact science. Cheyne Stokes, hypoxia, mottling. Is this what it feels like to be certain? Resume school, resume work, resume life. Know that you won't be spending your nights next to an adjustable bed shrouded in white linens. Know that you don't need to keep your phone on all night, just in case. Know that after a few months, grass will cover the dirt and the phone will stop ringing. Climb out of the hole that held you, its walls skyscrapers of uncertainty. Open your eyes, gather your things, make sure to check out at the front desk.