

WAIT, IT GETS WORSE

Love, Death, and My Transformation from Control Freak to Human Being

By Lydia Slaby

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At age thirty-three, Chicago attorney Lydia Slaby developed a grapefruit-sized tumor "strangling a huge vein attached to [her] heart" (14). Diagnosis: "diffuse large B-cell lymphoma involving the mediastinum Stage II" (31). And so begins this lucid and harrowing odyssey of medical crisis and mayhem. Familiar with the genre having edited scores of healing stories, I anticipated the narrative arc, but not Lydia's exceptional resources. That is, the crisis is particular but the cure is holistic. And Lydia is young, intelligent, inquisitive, well schooled, and a gifted writer. She has a large and devoted network of family, friends, and colleagues; a lucrative, satisfying legal career with health benefits; and access to quality care at a leading teaching hospital. The finale is brief, and her perspective of recovery is fresh. The history of medicine and cancer care is a volley between a systemic model (Hippocrates's four humors, Claudius Galen's black bile, Sidney Farber's chemotherapy blasts) and an isolated model (cancer as a solid mass requiring radical surgery). Cancer isn't one-dimensional, and neither is our responsibility. Lydia addresses her body, mind, emotions, spirit, and energy—and heals. She writes that her new job is "to be hyperaware of what is happening, to adapt to the circumstances, and to respond in the kindest and most effective way possible" (253). In other words, listen to your heart lest it screams louder. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 21 November 2019