

Two Poems by Ally Malinenko

Doctor's Orders

I need to drink less
only a glass or two of wine
not every night
no more hard liquor
no scotch or vodka
no more shots at the bar
with Keith
or maybe no bar at all
I need to eat less food
more vegetables
less white
no bread
no pasta
no rice
more broccoli
more cauliflower
something called flax
which rumor has it
is like throwing sand
in your food
I need to exercise more
not just the five mile walk
I take every day
every day, mind you
but something aerobic
jogging
sort of thing
I need to lose 20 lbs
the nutritionist told me so
when I asked her what I can
do about this diagnosis

she tells me about recurrence rates
and how they don't know anything
but that being fat
doesn't help
and I need to stress less
sleep more
stop stressing about cancer at 37
or the lack of sleep you're getting
because of cancer at 37
stop stressing about how you got the rare cancer
and chemo doesn't matter
and the surgery took three attempts
this summer
dressing in that purple gown
like some sort of fucking cancer princess
stop stressing that you kept
your diagnosis a secret
yes a secret
from your parents because
they are both already so sick
stop stressing about your father's illness
that put him in the hospital for five weeks
this summer
and things got so bad that your mother
sent that email saying
better come now
they don't think he'll make it
stop stressing about your mother
sick with chemo crying on your couch
lying flat her leg kicking at the pillow
like a child
begging your father to take her home
because she can't do this anymore
because the treatment won't work
because it doesn't matter
and he says

angry like I rarely hear him
what are you going to do then, lay down and die?
Lay down and die?
Is that what you want?

Taxi Ride

Because we've had some wine
even though I shouldn't
we start talking about it again
even though we hadn't in weeks

and I tell you that the running
is helping
not because I need to lose weight
which I do
but because
when I do it,
I'm only my body

this thing that has betrayed me

and I'm not my mind anymore.

You see, after 8 months I cannot mesh
the two together again.
I'm only one or the other
mostly just my mind
trapped inside this disobedient
suit of flesh and cords

But when I run
I am only tendons
and muscle
heart pumping

cells slushing
like a machine that could never stop working

but moreso,
I'm telling you this
over wine because what I can't talk about
is that feeling
of death
like being forced into a taxi
and driven away from the best party
you've ever been to
full of everything you love
your hands pressed against the back window
desperate.

Ally Malinenko is the author of the poetry collection *The Wanting Bone* (Six Gallery Press) and the YA novel *This Is Sarah* (Bookfish Books). She has two poetry books forthcoming, *How to Be an American* (Six Gallery Press) and *Better Luck Next Year* (Lowghost Press). She lives in the part of Brooklyn the tour buses don't come to.