

THE SPOON RIVER Poetry Review

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Sixty-five Roses

We didn't know, when we got the diagnosis,
what it meant. It doesn't have to do with cysts,
nothing fibrous about it. When we kissed
our daughter she was salty. That made it cystic fibrosis.

She was seven months old, we hardly knew
what was at stake. She didn't play the violin
or have her stair-step laugh; didn't love the talk of old women
or weep over men who would work for food.

A nurse said, once a little boy, when his parents told him,
misunderstood that he had cystic fibrosis
and told his classmates he had sixty-five roses
in his chest, which was why he couldn't breathe like them.

For months we clung to the misnaming, the alias,
refused to believe it was what the doctors had told us.