

THE SPOON RIVER Poetry Review

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How I Decided Not to Write a Sestina about Cystic Fibrosis

A woman from workshop tells me afterwards, during a break between classes, that a sonnet is not the right form for the story of my daughter's diagnosis, that if I want to work in form, a sestina would be better because there just isn't enough room to move around in a sonnet, the story is too big for the form, and I say to this woman yes, you could be right, thinking how the diagnosis also was too big for the test they used to make it— a little patch of sweat-soaked gauze not enough to foretell a whole life, or death—so, thinking of that, I open my notebook and write spaced out along the left margin the six most important words from the sonnet—sweat, baby, rose, salt, test, cry—and begin: sweat can be the ratty sweatshirt she wore the whole year she was fourteen; baby is how her hair tendriled down in soft wisps from her hairdo for the prom; I change the sixty-five roses into rows of bleachers in the gym at her seventh-grade band concert; the salt, I turn into money we salted away for her car; I am making the only test she fails three times be her driver's test when the woman from workshop looks up and asks *How old is your daughter?* and when I say *She'll be seventeen in September,* the woman says *Oh, I'm sorry* then goes back

to her book so quickly that I realize
she thinks I said *She'd be*
seventeen in September. . . . I look down
at my page. I can't make it mean anything else,
what the woman thinks she heard,
or this last word, *cry*.