

Sanctuary

by Joanne Jagoda

I'm a blondish plucked chicken
underneath my burgundy scarf
though I thought I was bold and tough
when I cut my hair short weeks ago
ready with wigs and peacock-bright coverings
until the last wisps started their heartless descent
and I wept, sprawled on the bathroom floor

waiting my turn, I sit
on the leather chair
magazines unopened on my lap
admitted by default to this curious flock
a sorority I never wanted to join

quietly chirping in different languages
draped in cottons, silks, perky knits
exotic birds in festooned plumage
we steal wary glances at one another

bald beautiful birds shorn to their essence
stoic smiles, jutting cheekbones, haunted eyes
a thirty-something with a hennaed pate sits to my left
proud and elegant, so cool and hip
until she cries, comforted by her mom
I sigh; she is too young for all of this

name called, ID checked again
my chemo cocktail prepared
I play my Indigo Girls and close my eyes

I see the others in the room we share
connected to the tubes

tied to each other by strings of understanding
the red poison drips relentless

hopeful birds we are all
sometimes we chat
sometimes we huddle quietly under warm blankets
tended to by nurses, family and friends
we hover bravely
not knowing what tonight or tomorrow may bring
praying we will soar again

