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## Three Stories for Claire and Henrietta

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**Three Stories // Alison Schuppert**  
*for Claire and Henrietta*

[Cancer]

The thing about disease is  
it doesn't care who you are.  
You try telling Cancer  
He can't take the life of a woman in Baltimore or a  
13-year-old girl.

[Scared]

At one end of the city  
a girl sleeps soundly in her rainbow bed while an-  
other  
trembles in fear  
falling on the bathroom floor.

[Scientific Revolution]

Henrietta lay lifeless as  
the knife excised her body.  
Like a saw slicing skin in rhythm, a meat cutter, the  
ten blade  
harvested eternal life.

[1969]

The horizon, indistinguishable in shades of moun-  
tain gray and blue,  
lights ablaze at the opposite end of the spectrum.  
Hundreds of red and yellow trees have sprouted in  
pyramid formation  
in the middle of the ocean. The space shuttle

reaches higher and disappears-  
the sun has not yet risen.

[Beginnings]

Before there was the falling girl, the woman  
what was the world?  
Before the people, before the monomer cells,  
before the brilliance of innovation- a space ship  
soaring  
like lighthouses in the sky?

[Microscopy]

Even the most infinitesimal of microbes,  
*Staphylococcus aureus* or a dust mite, effectively  
invisible,  
can become visible. Harmful, harmless  
this tool does not discriminate.  
The pathologist peers over the microscope, exalt-  
ing.

[Death]

She lies in a bed near Hopkins  
in Baltimore. She knows  
they didn't get it.  
They didn't get it at all.

[Assembly]

What is attraction anyway?

After the chaos came the conference of  
atoms forming subunits  
like rain reaching for the ground.  
Some forces can't be fought.

[2003]

Something is lighting the sky  
brighter than the sun- a meteor shower in the mid-  
dle of the day.  
The rainbow girl watches  
enthralled by the sight.

[Taken]

They took her into space, you know.  
Stole her, violated her, spread her  
across the world. Like peanut butter she would not  
expire.  
Like the tides, she just kept coming back to life.

[Relativity]

A collider in Geneva recently  
propelled particles past the speed of light.  
What happens if every theory made  
to make disorder orderly  
is false?

[Understanding]

We know they took her into space,

they say. Our HeLa is still alive in labs worldwide,  
they say. She is dead we know she is dead,  
they say.

[2003- Columbia]

What if the meteor shower  
wasn't really a meteor shower?  
What if the rainbow girl watching understood that  
seven lives ended that day,  
longingly loving space anyway?

[Cycles]

A line. Linear with a beginning and an end.  
Join the opposing sides and a new shape forms-  
a circle. Beginningless. Endless.  
The rainbow girl wants to pretend it's still a line.

[Tragedy]

Teenagers- only children, really  
flocked to school,  
only to hear the name of their missing,  
falling girl called every. single. day.

[Vengeance]

The rainbow girl wants to kill You  
though You cannot die.  
To be physically maimed, burn at the stake, drown-  
these are the fates You deserve.

### [Funeral]

There are the stages of grief  
all adults know.

Disbelief and Denial. Isolation. Anger. Eventually  
acceptance.

*Think of Me* plays on as adults witness a form of  
sorrow they do not comprehend-  
children singing *Phantom* for their friend.

### [Evolution]

Perspective is always changing  
so how does anyone ever gain it?

Elusive, like a chameleon shifting colors  
like the crack in the tile that went up in flames.

### [Expansion]

The universe and Cancer are one in the same.

Always growing larger and engulfing

Like a person, good and evil coexist within

A black hole, the sun, a dead body, a promising  
treatment

### [Baggage]

Looking at this rainbow girl no one would know  
she lost a friend to Cancer or loved space until that  
day

the day she couldn't see

she'd grown up. *Think of Me* played on...