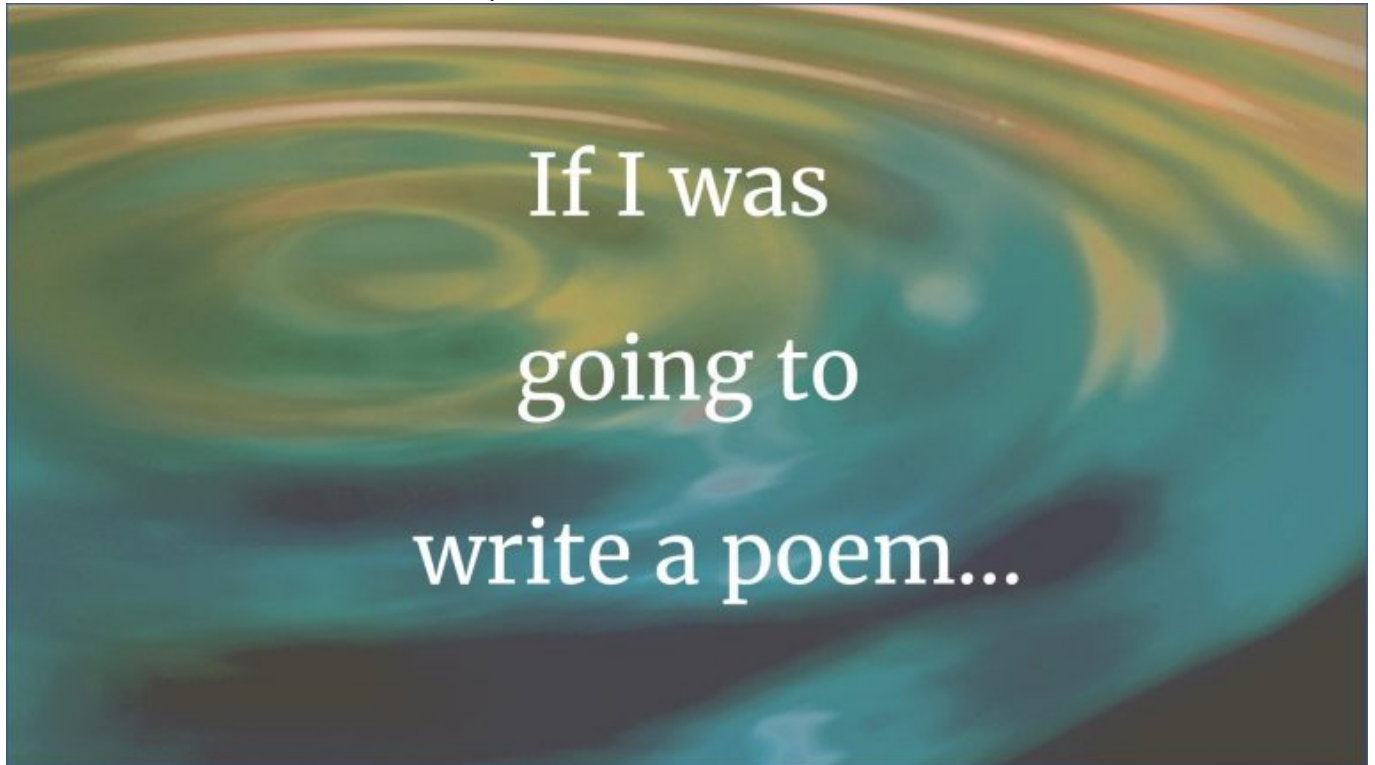


# Walnut Shells and BRCA

Category: Poems

written by Jazmine Gabriel | October 9, 2020



If I was going to write a poem,  
It would be—  
It probably shouldn't be—  
About how much I hate the dog.  
The way he licks his paws for hours  
In the middle of the night  
When the baby is no longer crying.

It also wouldn't be—or describe  
The way the woman at the homeless shelter said  
Excuse me! when I was standing in her way.  
Her eyes blazed with something specific like:

Don't feel too self-congratulatory you  
Stuck-up white bitch.  
This is my life every day.  
If your life is easy, you're in the way.

Which is true.

If I was going to write a poem,  
It would never contain some clever allusion  
About spending the morning putting a comma in  
And the afternoon taking it out.  
Nothing about the cruelest month or petals and  
metro stations. No white chickens.

In fact, its likely I'd exclude commas, either by  
Accident or on purpose,  
In homage to a former life spent grading freshmen paper's  
On *Aristotle's Conception of Happiness* by  
Accounting Majors in Upstate New York.

Maybe I would include  
Something about a patient I saw, who had breast cancer three years ago,  
When she was 32.

She feels like a shell, she said.  
A walnut shell.

I don't know if she said "walnut,"  
But picture a walnut shell.  
She has no ovaries now, no uterus, no sex drive.  
No car or cell phone either, so she misses  
Appointments.  
And gets called "noncompliant" by the nurses.  
But she knows what they think of her.  
And she never cries.

Except when she did.  
Because she can't take it anymore.  
And also, her husband wants to have sex.

I cried too.  
Maybe I shouldn't have.

Any poem I'd write would not play with the  
Subjunctive or conditional tenses  
Or be annoyingly self-aware or rife with repetition  
Or other artificial machinations.  
Because a poem should not mean, but be,  
But...

If I were to write a poem, I'd only describe  
The dog's wet eyes when they droop in self-pity  
As we play with the baby and shoo-shoo-shoo him  
Away down the hall, so he can coat the fancy wool rugs  
In thick, white tufts of hair  
That the baby likes to dip her bagel in.