

The background is a light pink color with a repeating pattern of stylized, line-art flowers. A thick, multi-lined pink ribbon loops across the lower-left and bottom-center of the page. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font.

ESTER VIOLA

TWO
SISTERS

Chapter 1:

Emilia and I: a history of fear

It had already happened to my mother and to her mother forty years before that, as well as to three great aunts in the nineteenth century; but I'm not sure about that last bit. It's possible that my family's clinical history was worsened by my mother's sisters out of a fatalistic-Catholic tendency. We must have a curse on us, like the descendants of Abraham. It added a layer of distinction. In short, I grew up knowing one thing for sure: there was no way it wouldn't happen to us, too. By us, I mean me and Emilia, my sister.

Two words encapsulated all that had happened. Breast cancer. A couple of words were enough for the private apocalypse of a family. "What bad luck," they said at home instead of "breast cancer." As though it weren't a case of logical continuity; as though the problem weren't the fact that my mother neglected her health. For them, cancer had been nothing else but one big "nothing can be done."

Virtually pain-free; that is how they remember her, always. After a while, dying becomes a normal fact of life, at least to hear it told by those still alive. My aunts had also spirited away the file with all my mother's tests and medical records so that Emilia and I wouldn't find it. I asked to see it hundreds of times, and hundreds of times I was told that they didn't know where it could be. I fought this battle for years, deploying arguments that were perfectly reasonable. "If you have it, give it to me, I beg you. At least I'll get an idea; I can take it to the breast specialist." I was thirteen and didn't even have breasts. But



it was no good. My aunts were firm but kind, “We’re terribly sorry but we just don’t know where it ended up, perhaps it got lost during the move.” Not once had they moved house, as far as I know; but they were right to lie. Better to leave me alone with my Google searches for “breast cancer symptoms” as an adult.

My name is Elena. All of this happened nearly thirty years ago. Now I’m forty-four, and a statistic.

“She had left us.” My mother. I could never stand that phrase. “She had left us.” Left us to go where? You leave when you set off on a trip. You leave when you’ve had enough. You leave if you think you’ll still be coming back. If you die, you never leave. And she had died.

“If it had happened nowadays, perhaps something could have been done.” By now the doctor says it to me without even taking his eyes off the piece of paper, when I go in for check-ups and try yet again to play the card of my inescapable genetic make-up, to try and force him to predict my future as a human being in good health or not, as the case may be.

For him, the only inescapable thing about me is my hypochondria, and there’s no cure for that. Fear is a little like pride, or like unrequited love. You’ve got it, and you have to deal with it.

That, I suppose, is how my mother lives on in my mind; in the form of anxieties. I was eight years old, Emilia three. Eight is too young to remember her well but old enough to have filed away various vague memories, and call them nostalgia. Inés was her name. I love that name, it seems like one of those soft liquorice sweets when I utter it.



Inés. There's an exotic feel to it. It had been her grandmother's name; in those days, it was common in southern Italy to make no major changes when naming a baby, so that everyone was called the same thing, one generation at a time.

I have only a few clear images of her, among the other, faded ones – like sections of good negatives among thousands of blurred photos. I often see her in my sleep, in those colour photos. It's always the same dream. I'm at the seaside. A voice laughs, Dive in! And in tears, I reply "I can't dive in, I can't touch the bottom, there are sharks!" my feet clinging to the rocks because I can't see the seabed. I must be around four years old. My father won't confirm the dream: he laughs, and says, "Your mother was afraid even in the shallows, what are you talking about diving off the rocks? I used to have to inflate the paddling pool on the beach every summer, she'd make you sit in it with your armbands on, you and your sister."

Anything good that has ever happened to me in life has always been polluted by three words. Genes; heredity. Cancer. It's as though I've been waiting for cancer for twenty years. I thought about it on the day I graduated, on the day I signed the mortgage papers, on the day Marco was born. It's a silly thing, in a way, but it happens. I've never asked myself why. Perhaps by worrying, I am showing life that I'm on guard, and to reward me for that, life chases away the danger?

Or, to paraphrase Philip Roth, it all goes to show that in life, worrying works?

I know it could happen to me, too – to us, there's my sister too – because anyone can make mistakes, but not cells. Genes are the math-



ematics that rule us. They don't make mistakes.

I can't even save myself by thinking it might skip a generation. My grandmother, then my mother. Both. A sequence that's more infallible than Fibonacci's. There's no hope that my destiny won't happen. It's just numbers, probability. And I work with those things, with numbers and probability.

We look alike, Emilia and I. We're two peas in a pod, as sisters sometimes are. With us, it's as though nature had straightened things out after using me as the prototype. We share the exact same features, but hers are more symmetrical, softer and more feminine. Emilia is the kind of woman that looks like she's wearing makeup even when she's not. Whereas I'm the kind that, when she goes out without makeup on, is showered with concern from her co-workers - "Are you not feeling well?" She, Emilia, has doe eyes. A slight resemblance to Julia Roberts. Ever since she turned sixteen she has always had some ardent admirer ready to satisfy her every whim, just a text message away. As for me, one might say "She's not bad, with her makeup on."

This idea of dying began to torment me when I was in high school. That led to panic attacks, which later toned down into simple hypochondria thanks to my shrink. With the money I've spent on non-existent problems, I could have bought myself a second home, at the seaside. Not Emilia. Emilia is a little more carefree. Whatever is meant to happen will happen. But I don't want anything to happen. That's the point.

That May 12th was the first time that the breast specialist didn't wave us both off with "see you next year." Just me.



Emilia had to do more tests. She behaved as though nothing had happened. As though the words “further tests” weren’t practically a synonym for “catastrophe, disease.” A minuscule nodule that hadn’t been there the previous year. The doctor sees the blood drain from my face, and asks “Elena, is everything all right?” in that tone that’s telling you to scratch beneath the glossy surface and read between the lines, “This is simply routine, you know, there’s nothing to be too worried about.”

Is everything all right? All I could think was that “Is everything all right” is the question they usually ask when absolutely nothing is all right.



Chapter 2:

Google diagnoses and Beth March

Silences. They always tell the truth; not words. If words help you, if you can manage to appear calm and confident between sentences and pauses, or if you're talented enough to learn to talk very fast, you'll manage to cheat. To lie and have people believe you. Not when you keep quiet. When you keep quiet, everyone always knows why; it's like a ready-solved riddle. Silence is always self-explanatory.

We go back home. It must be around three kilometres from the doctor's surgery to her house; the road is busy, there are traffic lights. Not to mention the dazzling sunshine that clashes dissonantly with what's going on in my head right now – and in the car, I just cannot seem to fill it, the silence. Although it's up to me. I keep not talking; I'm desperate to find a reassuring way to start the conversation, given that a conversation is required, to distract her if nothing else. I'm afraid that Emilia can feel I'm being too quiet; I'm afraid she'll understand that I'm scared. It's always someone's fault, silence. And now it's my fault if nobody is talking. Emilia keeps glancing over at me, her expression ranging from annoyed to quizzical. Then she leans her head against the window, in a funny, childlike way. Disapproval. She doesn't last long among this lack of reactions, and she starts laughing. A nervous yet heartfelt giggle. She's laughing. Better than nothing, I think to myself.

“Jesus, Elena. You've gone white. Shouldn't I be the pale one?”

I observe her, looking for signs of panic on her face, but I find none.



“Fine, shall we lighten up a bit? I know everything’s fine, I’m sure. It’s just. It’s just, you know, Emilia.”

In a split second, I regret having said anything.

“Yes, I know.”

Her face clouds over again. I feel like an idiot.

It’s back. Our mother’s ghost. Where other people have a memory, we have a nightmare. Cancer. Cancer. As though it were a curse, that we’re destined to get. Emilia takes a deep breath.

“Will you stop it, please, Elena? You’re not helping me that way.”

Now I feel stupid, and guilty to boot. Emilia makes things worse, because she becomes kinder. As though she has to take care of my panic first, and only then look after herself.

“Sometimes you seem obsessed. Our mother didn’t die of cancer. She died of carelessness. It was the wrong era to get ill.”

“Whereas this is the right one.”

We both give a crooked smile. “Sorry”, I say.

“I mean, to die of it you almost have to want to. Mum wouldn’t even let the doctors examine her. Do you remember what our father used to say? She was as stubborn as anything. She thought the cancer would just go away if she ignored it. Today she would have lived, Elena. Please, calm down.”



That “Please” sounds like a caress. I wish I could be like her. For the past half hour I’ve been short of breath and feel a weight pressing on my sternum. Emilia opens her diary and jots down the time of the appointment with the radiologist. The pen doesn’t tremble on the paper. Then she turns back to me.

“Did you hear the words ‘extremely urgent’, by any chance?”

“No, of course not.” I try to draw strength from her strength.

“So why are you making that face?”

That face is making itself, I want to say.

“Are you thinking of Beth in Little Women?”

Emilia stares at me while I keep on driving. Then she shuts her pocket diary, rubs her hands over her lap and smiles, waiting for me to remember something and to smile back.

Beth. Beth in Little Women. That sickly yet determined, piano-playing little girl. That quiet character who was destined for misfortune from page one of the book. And indeed, one day she ends up in bed with scarlet fever and she dies of it, because her heart is too weak. I read Little Women when I was ten. We had to read it over the Christmas holidays for school. When I got to the chapter where Beth dies, one evening I had an anxiety attack, ran a temperature and spent three days throwing up. My aunt went into school the week after and told the teacher she was an idiot.

“Did you hear what the doctor said? It’s a precaution. If there’d been anything to worry about he would have had to tell us. As a profession-



al obligation. What I'm trying to say is, maybe it's a bit too soon for my funeral. Elena, I'm a doctor. Or are you forgetting that?"

Yes. She is a doctor. But this is me we're talking about. I've got the worst character of anyone I know: I spend my life suspecting that a tragedy is about to ensue. I prepare for war, and I don't even know who it's against.

I've never been the type to place too much belief in happiness. For me, happiness has always been something that ticks away like a time-bomb. A kind of danger, where others see life going on, business as usual. Other people have a life; I have the organisation of my defences. To me, "Everything's fine" is simply a warning, always the prelude to something else. To catastrophe, of course. That's why I do what I'm best at – worrying.

I know exactly where all these crowded thoughts come from, taking the place of "enjoying life." From there. Her, my mother, cancer. Spending your first few years at secondary school saying "My mother's dead" leaves a scar. This. You don't feel safe. It's like presenting a certificate of good health, knowing it's fake. Knowing that soon they will discover that you're not healthy either. That you haven't the faintest idea how to live without fear.

Cures? There are none. I'm not cut out for psychoanalysis; I've tried. One would need to be born again, but different. With one of those open, sunny types of characters; a sea-view character, a character without shutters. Those people who are always bouncing around, unflinchingly cheerful. The types who never feel nostalgic, aren't they wonderful? They've been touched by the hand of some god or other. They



always feel like they've just come into the world and that the best is yet to come. Envy is a precious commodity, but I can always find a little for them. They deserve it.

It must have something to do with positive vibes. Mercury not in retrograde, Saturn aligned? Both Mum and Dad still alive, loving but distant; circumstances, well-managed family wealth? They even have naturally straight hair in that shade of brown that turns golden when you go on a yacht. They have a yacht. Damn them.

As she's getting out of the car Emilia asks me, "Next week are you coming to the radiologist with me or will you stay at home Googling 'breast cancer', 'breast cancer how important is heredity', 'breast cancer survival rates if caught in time'?" As though any sort of normal planning and a shred of ordinary good humour were possible at this time.

"Of course I'll come with you."

Five minutes later she sends me a message.

While you're at it, look up the website www.yoursisterhasnointention-ofdying.com too.

Love you.



Chapter 3:

Waiting rooms

Calm doesn't take orders, and it can't be learned. It has nothing to do with courage; you can't give yourself calm, you can't even count on ancestral memory. Courage, on the other hand, can be summoned somehow or other. In certain, extreme conditions it becomes a genetic reflex. Calm is the reaction that's most distant from human instincts.

The reptile brain, it's called. I read that somewhere. "It triggers the automatic defensive flight or fight reactions."

The moment we perceive a threat, the sympathetic nervous system forces a series of changes on the body (the heart rate rises, breathing gets faster, blood moves from the digestive system to the muscles, blood vessels get narrower, the pupils dilate). All our energies are perfected and multiplied so that we can save ourselves. We've inherited two reactions from pre-historic times: fight or flight.

I must certainly be a special case, and I'm not exaggerating when I say my anxiety is so powerful it could eat my skin, but Emilia really does go to these medical examinations with the same attitude as which I go to the dentist. I don't know where she got this Olympian composure from. It must be the doctor's life, must be because she deals with death every day. If you deal with death every day, does the idea of dying scare you less? Do you start getting gradually used to it? Or does it have to do with knowledge: since you're familiar with the means available to medicine, and the ways a body can respond to it, do you recognise when it's time to stay calm?



Emilia has been calling me daily since Monday. I don't know who she's more concerned about. We'll find out whether she's sick or not from the x-rays. As for me, it's certain, I've been sick since I was ten years old. Sick with what, neither of us knows.

The appointment with the radiologist is at 6 pm. I've smeared more foundation than usual onto my face so that my recent sleepless nights might seem less obvious. At the office, I've been about as useful as a new recruit for a week now. All the calculations in the dossier have had to be checked over twice by Barbara, our new intern. I can't think of anything except "Nodule, radiologist, probable earthquake in everybody's lives." Barbara has picked up on it and hasn't asked me anything; in the past week she's noticed I've been distracted, with deep dark under-eye circles, and I've lost my appetite. One day she opened my Google search history because she had to find some addresses, and she found my searches. Cancer, nodule, small dimensions. She clearly thought it was my diagnosis and for a couple of hours she was as quiet as a mouse. She's become servile and obedient since it happened and stares at me anxiously as soon as she thinks I'm otherwise occupied and won't notice. She looks for signs to confirm her suspicions; she keeps asking if I want to leave her to deal with the spreadsheets, the phone calls, the calculations. All this with a zeal that makes me think how sick people must feel when they realise they're on stage before an audience filled with pity.

"It's my sister, the one who has to have tests, not me", I told her yesterday. I was tired of seeing her buzzing around like a busy bee. She just said, Ah. She knows she's not allowed to add anything else.



People never know what to say when you bring up cancer. There's a sort of Morse code of terror: "She's not well", "She's been ill." They can't even say the word.

And indeed, when someone tries to dig a little deeper – "What's she got?" – they say it again:

"She's not well", but their voice is in bold type now, slowly emphasizing the words and dropping down a tone to make it sound serious. Cancer is a word that must be skimmed over. Because it's like saying, "Death's closest relative." Whereas in actual fact, in some cases that's not true. It's no longer true. People are increasingly better. You can recover. A lot of things are kept under control because a lot of things are less uncontrollable than they were thirty years ago. I know the figures, I work with numbers. And now, the numbers are good. They're getting better and better.

There are five of us in this waiting room. Nice lighting, a pretty colour on the walls. The view from the window takes in Brera, and Santa Maria delle Grazie, home of The Last Supper. It would be a stunning building, were I only capable of noticing it today.

On the coffee table in front of the sofas are stacks and stacks of magazines, all women's weeklies, their covers crumpled, as though a storm of hours had rained down on them. One magazine is so old that the main story is about Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's twins, and Hollywood's happiest, most multiracial family. Angelina Jolie is the cover star. I pick it up and leaf through it quickly but I can't make sense of the sentences. That's something I've noticed, when you are very agitated you lose the ability to focus on anything else. It's like reading



with eyes made of soap: nothing remains, not even a moment later. The letters, the words, look like bizarre symbols without any specific meaning.

“She did the right thing.” The silence is broken by one of the patients. She must be 55, or 39, you can’t tell, her skin has been smoothed by some expensive beauty therapist.

“Sorry?” I reply.

“Angelina. She had everything removed before anything could happen.”

Another patient looks up and says witheringly, “But cancer moves anyway, if it doesn’t get to one part it’ll turn up in another.”

Emilia stops reading and starts talking with them both. She asks about their diagnoses. What point they’re at. The chemotherapy. She encourages them, saying “Me too, probably”, and makes a joke about how long it took her to grow her hair, and now she might lose it. In here, nobody says “She’s not well” anymore. And we don’t say it because when it happens to us, we can give a name to our fear. I stand up while they’re talking, go to the bathroom and put my wrists under cold running water. I lean my head against the mirror. Four people are ahead of us in the queue. What does that mean? One hour? Two hours in this state?

“Let’s cut the drama shall we?” Emilia would say if she could see me now.



Chapter 4:

Red Plastic

There are some memories that stay much more vivid, as though the brain looked at the world with its very own selective retina. With some days, you can remember the tiniest details forever; you even hold onto the thoughts that were going through your mind. Every image from that and the following weeks has remained crystal clear for me.

After around twenty minutes of flicking through magazines without reading them, in that waiting room, we had heard at least five stories about chemotherapy, that then turned into stories about hair growing back identical to before; as a matter of fact, instead of annoying me, this gave me some relief. I thought, if we're at the point where we're allowed to worry about such apparently unimportant details as hair, then it means we're getting somewhere with these cures. It means that chemotherapy is doing what it has to, namely making progress.

"It would be nice to just have to worry about hair. I wish we were at that point already", I said to Emilia, almost in her ear, under my breath, trying to simulate the steadiest, most natural tone I could.

"Look, we are already at that point Elena, if breast cancer is caught in time", Emilia replied, with the calm voice of a nursery teacher. Then she added, "You're the only person here who's about to have an anxiety attack." This, she said to me with a sigh.

"We're not here to check your blood pressure, Emilia."

"No, Elena, but practically."



Ten minutes later it was our turn. Emilia said hello to the radiologist, introducing herself as a fellow doctor. They spent a few minutes talking and seemed like two friends. He invited us to take a seat, and stayed behind his desk waiting for my sister to finish rifling through a folder in her bag. Emilia passed him the prescriptions, which he glanced at briefly with a rather curt “ok”; from his tone, I tried to extract the only clue I was interested in, the merest sign that we could stop worrying.

The office was divided into two parts; the entrance where he spoke to patients, and a corridor containing the machinery. There were paintings hung on the walls as though arranged in a home, with great care to ensure they went together well. We immediately noticed a few pieces of modern art that would be more suitably kept in a safe, rather than a doctor’s surgery. There was a *Plastica Rossa*. Emilia and I both spotted it immediately with the same automatic reaction of incredulity: it can’t be a Burri, it must be a copy. I thought this wasn’t the right time to ask, but Emilia thought otherwise. Ever since she was born, I’ve always envied her unfailing ability to distract herself. When we came home from primary school and it was almost Mother’s Day, while all the other girls were finishing their cards and learning the poem, she asked if she could change the figures in the drawing and the words in the rhyme, “because it’s for my daddy.”

“Is that a Burri?” Emilia asked.

“Yes”, the radiologist looked up and smiled at her.

“You’re kidding? It can’t be.”



“Why not?”

“Because you wouldn’t keep it here in your office. Nobody would keep it in an office.”

“This is where it’s needed.”

Neither of us asked, “Needed for what?” Perhaps, we thought, he was the one that needed it.

That melted red plastic, one-metre square, was reminiscent of muscles, something ripped, cut. Perhaps it had to do with the field hospitals where Burri had been in wartime, or perhaps not. Perhaps it was simply meant to be melted red plastic. Who knows. It’s modern art. It wasn’t made to be understood. Nor to be questioned. It was certainly a distraction, that much I know.

At the end of the room, behind a glass partition and beyond the *Plastica Rossa*, was the mammography equipment. We were still looking at the artwork. That melted red, the stringy rubber. It was hypnotic. We couldn’t see anything else. Perhaps that’s what it was needed for, Burri’s *Plastica Rossa*, in that doctor’s office; that’s why he kept it there.

In the minutes that followed, the radiologist realised two things straight away. The first was that Emilia wasn’t worried. The second, that it would have been better had I not been there. I kept rubbing my hands over my knees. Everybody has strength stored up somewhere. Some touch their neck, squeezing it and putting pressure on the nape with their fingertips; others twist their hair. With me, it’s my knees; perhaps I have strength in my kneecaps. Emilia had asked me to go with her



for my sake, not hers. I realised that afterwards. She knew that for me to not be scared, I needed as many details as possible; I had to see for myself, so at least I'd stop torturing myself with my imagination.

When it was time for the mammography they asked me to wait outside. For the rest of that quarter of an hour, I tried to pick up scraps of their conversation, understanding one out of every four words they said. They spoke to each other like technicians. Emilia asked him about reducing the dose – of radiation from the machine, I supposed. Then the doctor showed her some sample images, “see here, this photo, look how dense the breast is, but you can see it.” You could see the cancer.

Seeing it is the key. Seeing it in time, seeing it beforehand. Seeing it. That's it. You need an accurate lens, you need a perfect photo, you need outlines, millimetres. The better you can see, the greater chance there is of intervening, of sorting it out, making it disappear. There is more order to cancer than to life.

They carried on communicating with each other using a reassuring idiom that I didn't understand. Emilia knew that in the worst-case scenario, she had a pretty good chance of having reasonably little to be afraid of. For me, however, these rather woolly hypotheses just won't cut it. All I could think of was the phrase “a pretty good chance of having reasonably little to be afraid of” sounded well beyond the limit of what I could rationally tolerate. I'd read *Little Women*, and after her diagnosis Beth died without too much beating about the bush.

I know what went through her mind when I was leaving the radiologist's room. Emilia said “Don't worry,” with the firmest smile she could



muster. I will never know how hard that smile was for her. I responded as best I could, but all I could manage was a defeated smile. Because I had forced her to think the unthinkable. “Just as well it’s me this is happening to,” that’s what was going through her mind; that’s how much she loved me.



Chapter 5:

Year of grace 2050

Right up until now, the year of grace 2050. Yes, I made it. I managed to stick around long enough to babysit my son's children, and watch five or six more remakes of Little Women. All of them ultra-faithful to the original; nothing changes except the actresses, each cast more beautiful and taller than the previous ones. Beth keeps on dying of scarlet fever, while Jo is still the champion of romantic disasters for headstrong girls.

It was thirty years ago, Emilia's cancer. Yes, they found she had cancer, in the end. But the diagnosis came in time for everything. Which means I can afford to remember that year with the details I like best – the times I fainted in hospital, the tears at her bedside after Emilia woke up from the anaesthetic, and her first words, "What's this low-rent hospital drama I've woken up in?" And all the times the nurses repeated (and she promptly repeated to me) "This lady does more harm than good by visiting you."

I accompanied her to her chemotherapy sessions. I bought her a wig she never wore. And, without a word, I collected all the clues that told me she would get better, that it wouldn't go the way it did for our mother. "She's eaten two croissants." "If she goes to the gym it means she's strong." "She's taken as little sick leave as possible; that means she's going to make it." She, on the other hand, picked up the clues to my anxiety and declared them out loud, often followed by an imperious "Elena! You should go to a shrink, a really good one. Or at



least explain to me how you decided to live with this level of anxiety.” Sometimes she said it laughingly, but not always.

It all goes to show that in life, worrying works. But she doesn’t know that.

I didn’t think we would ever see it. Old age, I mean.

Emilia had to have surgery. Twice. Always small incisions, always the right breast, like our mother. Everything was done very early on, that was the difference. Dying wasn’t the destiny of cells, as I’d thought. Emilia had been right. At her last check-up, the breast specialist said: “There’s nothing here anymore, it must have got fed up; it’s not coming back.” I’ve always considered that an incredible detail: cancer losing its fight against time. It’s the only instance in which being older makes you stronger. When you’re older, cancer is less bothered about you.

In our day, cancer was on a killing spree. That doesn’t happen nowadays. One hears forty-somethings discussing it the way we used to hear the word polio being mentioned. A distant echo, a monstrous but legendary myth. Something that no longer concerns us, or anybody else.

It took many years more, then came the screening tests, and after the screenings, one by one came the vaccines. DNA tests and pre-emptive cures. Perhaps that is how one can measure the happiness that progress brings: when you can afford to talk about diseases as though they were unhappy pages in a history book. Pages that are far away from where we are when we’re reading them; pages that belonged to



other people, people we no longer want anything to do with.

In all these years, Emilia has never been afraid. Or perhaps she's hidden it very well from me. She would turn those mammograms over in her hands and always say the same things: you see? It's clear, you can see it. Look at the outlines. They can remove that in no time.

As though the fact that the outlines on the photos were clear meant something good; or as though I could make any sense of it. They meant everything, and she knew it. The doctors would know what to remove, where, and what they would find. The crisper the image, the fainter the danger becomes. That's where the difference lies. In seeing.

Today, cancer is a word like any other. You avoid it, just as you avoid getting cavities. They have no idea, these kids of the future, what we've seen. Millimetres of diameter that turned into kilometres of fear. Not knowing if it was malignant or not, if you would live or not, if it would come back or not. If I wasn't sure of the fact that it's my melodramatic tendencies saying it, and myself as a motherless child thinking it, I would say it was our world war. On the rare occasions I do talk about it, I remember what we saw; my mother disappeared, I can still see her now as she crumbled away and turned to skin and bone in just months. And I think of all those who had to work and fail for years and years, to make cancer become what it is now. A distant past. Nowadays, nobody gets sick anymore; families no longer mourn premature deaths. Nothing is incurable anymore and to them, all this seems normal. To me, it seems like the greatest miracle that could ever happen.

