Vitreous

Harriet J. Melrose

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I.

Picture a small ferris wheel, its seats spinning
upside down, round and round. It's made
of lacy filaments, a fluorescent glow of lilac, pink,
or blue. It hangs on the windshield when you drive.
The retina specialist called it a wreath and film.
I see a wreath made of coils. The coils spin
faster when I change planes getting up from bed.
At first, the doctors thought the macula was bruised,
but eight months later, coils spin faster: pigments
in the macula have changed. The distortion evolves.
The ferris wheel collapses into a vortex of swirls
like eddies between rocks, enlarges, resembles
an inside-out full eclipse of the sun—bright orange
center, black corona. I see with my eyes closed:
fuchsia, purple, orange pebbles fill the wreath.
My eyes flutter, see a solid black ellipse before light
opens blackness to a ring. On the page, it's grey
and obscures words. Reading's an event in motion.
I move the page to see. The wreath's a barrier.
I can't see the keyhole. It distorts like a forest:
the density conceals what I yearn. I cannot see my face.

II.

The vitreous gel isn't the villain. My head's
steadied by a chin cup; on the other side, a flash
camera. Images of my eyes are taken at strobe
light speed. In another machine, geometric shapes
flash, just as fast. I'm immersed in op art of the 60's.
I'm told not to blink. Every 30 seconds, "Blink!"
The *Print Mint* pics flash again. Incorrect brain signals
snake to the optic nerve, creating "extra vision,"
or *Positive Vision*, the *visual disturbance*
of the ferris wheel. The signals might be shut
down. I also learn the retina damage is permanent.
Color blindness creeps in, not simple red/green
male color blindness, but the whole spectrum.
I confuse blues and greens; yellow and pink
distort like the TV being tuned. Toss up the dark

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colors: they're all the same. I can't shop for clothes
alone. I have a retina angiogram. For five days,
I pee neon Gatorade: the IV dye, Fluorescein,
detoxed by the kidneys. The ERG, the geometric
test, reveals a central dropout of vision in both eyes,
larger in the right. The dropout's total, meaning blind
in those areas. The damaged retina sends "toxic"
signals to the optic nerve where they meet,
in a bad marriage, the incorrect signals
from the brain. The medication takes time
to titrate. A collage (or is it a collision?)
of neuro-impulses stains the landscape I see.

Note. Harriet J. Melrose, 59-year-old author, who has a history of migraine with aura, developed Sjögren syndrome and rheumatoid arthritis at age 50; these were treated with hydroxychloroquine (HCQ). After 8 years, she developed constant binocular visual hallucinations in the shape of a ring surrounding the central vision (between 5 and 10 degrees). Initial ophthalmic and neurologic examinations as well as brain MRI were normal. Therefore, a vitreous origin of her symptoms was postulated. HCQ was discontinued without improvement in symptoms. Follow-up examination 6 months later showed bull's eye maculopathy typical of HCQ toxicity. Possible etiologies for the symptoms experienced by the poem's author include release phenomena and persistent migraine aura. Gabapentin provides moderate control of the distracting visual hallucinations.

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