

DEATH CERTIFICATE

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How far back in the chain to go?
I'm penning in an entry
on the parchment of public record,
creating a statistic for the students of disease,
writing too the final word
on the last page of the book
for the bereaved.

So robust, barrel of a woman,
layered in corsets from another century.
Her heart went dead December first,
but Staphylococci started
seeding her veins three days before,
breeding in the purple sore
that showed its color Labor Day.
An ulcer on her bottom,
branded there by months of sitting
staring at air, still as a Stonehenge rock.
We lost her when her mind burned out in May.

Should I say dementia killed her?
Not enough space
for a dissertation
on causation and its subtleties.
I can't just call it stoppage

of the clock—
that's one frame
of thousands
in a documentary.
I settle for "Septicemia, Staph."
The statisticians will be pleased,
two different categories.
And there's her daughter's face,
and her grandchildren at peace,
remembering her as maimed
by an invading legion,
forgetting
her forgetting
of their names.