



EXCERPT



**Now I Lay Me Down to Fight**  
*A Poet Writes Her Way Through Cancer*

November 14, 2023 | \$16, 96 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0799-0

*Cancer, did you know that I am a poet?* In stirring verse and essays, Katy Bowser Hutson chronicles her battle with breast cancer and the complications of faith amid such a fight. Accentuated by the art of Jodi Hays, Katy's words lead us through her resistance to sickness, fight for survival, and wrestling toward beauty.

## Some Joys Can Only Be Known in Sorrow

"Make no mistake: without treatment, this is fatal." In order to save my life, my oncologist made it quite clear that without her help, this was how I would die. There was no optimistic assurance that I was going to live. That's one thing I had that most people don't have: knowledge of how I would die. Maybe.

Cancer is a memento mori. I've had a sturdy stare down with death, which changed me. To the best of my knowledge, I don't have cancer now. But if you've had cancer, you know you're never free of it. Not really. I often tell people that I feel like Frodo Baggins after he's been wounded by a wraith—the hurt will always be with me. Or maybe like the apostle Paul, with the thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). That feels a bit holier. There was a point, after all, when a person literally could put their finger in the wound in my side. Although it wasn't advisable.

Five years down the road, I still have lots of souvenirs from treatment. My torso is a battlefield of scars. I can't quite feel the tips of my toes, a parting shot from chemo. The skin on my chest is still fused to my breastbone in places. The surgeon had to sever nerves in order to remove lymph nodes under my arm, so my son likes to run his finger down the back of my arm where I can't quite feel to figure out where the feeling starts and give me the heebie-jeebies. And I just get tired easily.

I wrote these thoughts for me, to survive. To fling out the fear and sadness onto a page where I could look at them and have more control and understanding. Where I could admit them and yell them and pray them. I hope they help you too. I wouldn't presume to know the ways cancer wounds others, any more than I'd presume to know how to treat it. But sorrow shared is half sorrow, right? And joy shared is double joy. Strangely, joy can even thread itself through terrible things. I'll go as far as to say that some joys can only be known in sorrow.

*Fumble Fingered (Written a few days before diagnosis)*

This world doesn't work well for us  
God spins it just fine,  
But we are fumble fingered.  
The cells are broken deep down.

We fuss with fixing spaceships with chopsticks  
And numb our nerves  
With pixels and ethers.

-adapted from chapter one



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## ENDORSEMENTS



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Katy Bowser Hutson is a forming member of the children's band Rain for Roots. She is the coauthor with Tish Harrison Warren and Flo Paris Oakes of *Little Prayers for Ordinary Days*, and a contributing author to *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God* and *Wild Things and Castles in the Sky*.

## Into the Valley of the Shadow of Death Life Is Found

"The poems in *Now I Lay Me Down to Fight* are luminous, honest, heartbreaking, and at moments even funny. They are at once defiant yet surrendered, buoyant yet profound, faithful yet never trite. To read them is to encounter a beautiful and brave soul who invites us into her vulnerability, illness, and mortality through images and stories as human as they are hopeful. I cried reading these verses—no surprise given the subject and my love for the poet. What did surprise me was how much I smiled as well. Katy Hutson has plunged into the darkness of cancer and there wrought beauty, goodness, wisdom, and even abundance."

—Tish Harrison Warren, Anglican priest and author of *Prayer in the Night*

"Katy Bowser Hutson's poems and short essays are bodily and frank. Also, they are infused with light and hope that never feels sentimental. Into the valley of the shadow of death Katy speaks words of life."

—Jonathan Rogers, host of The Habit Podcast and The Habit Membership for Writers

"In this collection Katy moves through the halls of medicine and the corridors of pain to find she is only a 'tiny speck of glory, barely sparking,' but one carried in the arms of Jesus. Out of the crucible of cancer comes this rare collection of poems sure to be a comfort to any who have cussed, fought, and cried their way through an unwanted diagnosis or any of the heartaches and griefs common to humankind."

—Margie Haack, author of *The Exact Place* and codirector of Ransom Fellowship

"Here is a writer who is as brilliant as she is brave; she brings us face to face with aches and joys that are so potent, they grip our hearts and refuse to let us run away from them. It is shocking how deeply personal yet widely relatable this body of work is. All in all, this is a very necessary book."

—Moyosola Olowokure, artist and performance poet

"Writing from within the very heart of pain, exhaustion, and a search for meaning, Katy Bowser Hutson lays open her questioning heart in a way that a reader will want to join her in negotiating with God for survival and relief. This is profitable reading for those of us whose want to do business with the God of salvation and healing."

—Luci Shaw, poet and author of *The Generosity*

"In this extraordinary book of poems, Katy Bowser Hutson names, knows, and faces the fear of cancer and all it contrives to take away. On each page, she steps through the unknowing, now resting, now fighting, always finding in language not just the death and darkness that follow from the fall, but also the grace that rises each day to meet it."

—Abram Van Engen, chair of the English department at Washington University and cohost of the Poetry for All Podcast



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