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First, it
was water-
melon, those
pre-cut chunks
in brittle plastic
bins. We could
barely keep enough
in the house to satisfy
the need. Chemo had killed
off coffee and cocktails and most
other fun cravings. This was before the
chicken pot pies, the loaded cheeseburgers
and the Dunkin' Donuts, fleeting impulses that
did not satisfy, that he couldn't even finish, that ended
up moving the scale numbers higher for me, while failing
to hold them steady for him. The days of lobster claws dipped
in lemon butter; tenderloin steaks, seasoned and grilled; massive
scrubbed Russets he'd stab before baking, cackling with glee like a
psychopath—those days were gone. Finally, the annual pears arrived
in their compartmentalized box, each wrapped in tissue, always one in
gold like an offering from the Magi. I never stopped expecting more from
that one. We were supposed to wait. We hated waiting. We did not have
time to wait. We waited. We checked for ripeness each day, applying gentle
pressure to the base of the stem. None of the pressure in those days felt gentle.
This was after the house had filled up with family and the cabinets with Ensure
and blue Powerade, after his aversion to all vegetables except salad was moot.
When he would eat almost nothing solid, he would accept those pears, peeled
and sliced and ripe enough to melt in the mouth. This was years after he had
weaned me from the canned pears of my childhood with the cool syrup that I
imagined was magic elixir, decades after the time I bought red Anjou pears
for their exotic beauty, partly to impress the cute cashier who looked like
Andre Agassi, even though I already had a man. This excellent man, who
didn't mind my pear-shaped body, who loved all of me, was now about
to leave me, unless I could keep him alive, hydrated and nourished
and engaged with life for a few extra days by eating pears.