

At the Christmas Party for the Infectious Diseases



there is hot fondue and white wine
and we thank our host because we are funny
like that. Varicella and Zoster are wearing red
dresses. Tuberculosis is at the door
and someone says, *But he looks fine to me*

and we say, *Exactly* as we take his scarf
and bring him a gimlet, extra Rose's. Syphilis
has brought a date. No one is surprised.
The lung diseases smoke menthols
in the garage because they can,

and when Typhoid fishes in the Gouda,
looking for lost bread, Malaria quietly
drops her long fork. In the living
room the tropical cousins speak
their own tongues, and I pause

at the rain syllables of their exotic
names: *Leishmaniasis, Schistosomiasis,*
Ascariasis, Trichuriasis. I could listen
to them chatter in bird calls all night long,
but Leprosy is losing at charades again,

and he throws his glass at the wall. The room
is quiet while a kind woman who is not
his wife takes him outside. When the door
closes behind them we laugh, because no one
can ever perform *Moby Dick* without looking

like a fool, and while the diseases
are still giggling, I kiss all of them on their open,
gasping mouths. Please—let me never know
precisely which one is responsible for killing me.