words that spell trouble can be music to the ear. "coronary thrombosis" has such timbre it could be a phrase an Italian lover whispers into his lady's ear when all else fails.

but the most malignant word of all is "melanoma." that's not a fit name for a cancer. that's the name of a girl on pago-pago who swims out with flowers in her hair to greet her Caucasian lover as he comes hard to starboard.

it's the name of a painting by DaVinci, a song sung by Nat King Cole: "Melanoma, Melanoma, men have named you. are you warm, are you real, Melanoma, or just a cold and lovely conglomeration of diseased cells?"

here is how a poem is born.

ray came into the office and sat down, he's a rookie father. i'm an old pro. "how's the kid sleeping?" "O.K. but keeps us up a lot."

"make sure you're not too quiet. get her used to sleeping with noise."

"we do, but we don't jump up and down."

"that's the way you pick a pup. stamp on the floor. make as much noise as you can. the one that remains calmest is the pick of the litter."

"that's a poem," ray said.

that's how you lose one. this is how you get it back.