

Metamorphose: A Chapbook

By

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METAMORPHOSE: A CHAPBOOK

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We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Master of Science degree,
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Waging War

Olive branches grant
no peace inside the body
that wages war
against me

Bombs go off
leaving cysts in place,
gut-wrenching pain
that brings this war field
to her knees

Swallow the daily
grenades as they wash
down to the pit of my stomach
waiting to erupt in silence

Scathing battle marks
line my skin in red butterfly
washes, and skin so dry
it hurts.

The battlefield knows
no temperature, raging
heat, murderous cold,
and back again.

The explosives fight back
and wait for the most
inopportune moment
to return fire.

Other Half

To be of worth
is a foreign concept
poorly fixed, and
I wish that I could
find myself in the
torture pits of my
brain matter, but
I am sure I won't

The contents of
a pocket with a
hole lingering
within, wishing
to be mended
by the hands of
my loved ones,
but no one knows
how to sew these
days.

Another plastic

bag torn to shreds
in the wooden limbs
Of Mother Nature, left
to rot in the weathering
wind that winter relies
on.

The solitary sock
waiting miserably
yet patiently at the
bottom of the basket,
desiring to be matched
with the one that I
had hoped would
bring me value
as the other half
to my pair.

doctors don't believe in fat girls

Maybe it's just your weight.

If you lost some
and revert to the size that you
were in the sixth grade
all of the pain that you feel
in the depths of your bones
and in your muscles and
in your joints, would all
disappear magically at
the snap of your fingers.

Maybe it's just your weight.

If you ate just meat and veggies,
only paleo-based things, and
forget the concept of dairy and
everything fried, sweet, salty,
and all in between, those
disgusting pounds would
drain away from the love
handles at the base of your hips.

Maybe it's just your weight.
Weighing down your mood
to make you feel this way.
It's all in your head and
your brain won't start feeling
better until you lose that weight.
Then you will feel better about
Yourself and all of those
symptoms will wash away with
each pound lost.

Maybe it's just you.

An Open Letter to My Withering 23-Year-Old Body

Your host is a noble squire. Her destiny is set in the stained glass windows that encapsulate her brain. She wishes she could have the normalcy that she always planned for herself, but you are stopping her. Through persistence, she will become the knight she was always meant to be. For now, you stand in her way, but one day, when she's strong enough, she will slay you as the dragon you represent.

Your tears are crocodile. You wish life could be different. Well, it can't. It doesn't work that way. You have been handed all of the cards, and if you try to give them away, you'll be a cheater. Cheaters never win. You can't cheat chance and coincidence, no matter how hard your body tries.

Your host desires to be free from the chains of restraint that all of the medical conditions bring her. She feels like a puppet in the same show over and over. Illness is her puppet master and his hands forbid her to cut herself loose from the strings that so desperately seem to hold her. She's a pretty little marionette. Where would he be without the star of his show? There are no understudies here.

You are as annoying as a mosquito buzzing repeatedly in everyone's ears, full of "I can't," "I'm tired," and "I'm in so much pain." You feel as if people secretly loathe you, and that may be true. People constantly get mad at you and find you a hindrance in their life. I mean, who wouldn't? You are an attention seeker with all of the hurt that resents your body. With all of the hurt, that dictates your life. You will never be able to be anything great, not when you constantly

have to take breaks so that your body doesn't implode. So that you can function as a "normal" human.

Your host deals with the toll that it causes her. She sets alarms and reminders to take medication that her Swiss cheese brain always seems to forget. Each time an alarm goes off it always seems to scare her, although this process has nearly become a ritual. The orange pill bottles sit like a boom barrier across her nightstand taunting her desired entrance to step across the threshold of wellness.

You could make a novel out of all of your pain, the pill bottles, the medical diagnoses, and all of the symptoms that plague your body. If you measured each problem as a brick, you could build half of the symptoms that plague your body. If you measured each problem as a brick, you could build half of the Great Wall of China.

Your host feels the pain. It's almost as if it is permanent, a tattoo forever reminding her of what makes her different, what makes her life feel nearly insufferable. She can't walk or sit for long periods without feeling sharp pain and she desires to give up. Comfy pillows and blankets are her best friends. She has to substitute free time with scheduled naps to get through the day, almost as if she's a toddler again. Who knew that at 23 she would be grasping onto the sweet delights of childhood that she dreaded so much back then? Her exhaustion is constant and feels like it has become the dreaded part of her that she hates to feel.

You walk around like Quasimodo, hunchbacked as if your spine will collapse inward and leave you a crumbling pile of dust in its demise. You desire to be Esmeralda, beautiful, brilliant, resilient, and strong. The oppressive governing body of yours won't allow that. It would rather have you burn at the stake than ever see you be successful. Tragedies work in that way. You

would know, after all. After all, you're just a volcano waiting to erupt, leaving nothing but destruction and more orange pill bottles in your path.

Your host feels the constant dread of feeling sick. Each day another battle on the scale to measure just exactly how sick she feels, because she no longer remembers what "okay" is anymore. It's a fairytale dream of a distant future, but fairytales aren't real. She's known that since she was a little girl. Science is, and it proves each diagnosis that has been thrown her way. She is a fragile bridge that can only take so much more before she collapses due to the rushing water of the incredible rainfall that floods her foundations of sanity that have yet to wash away. She only has so much strength, and it feels as if it all is being taken away from her one storm at a time.

You fall frail, like a withering corpse, and have to drag yourself through day-to-day life with the guise of a healthy person. You resemble a zombie. You always fall short of all that is expected of you so frequently that you fail again and again. Not that it should be so unexpected, I mean, the exhaustion and lack of sleep can only allow you to do so much. Look in the mirror and what do you see? Pale, flawed skin the color of chalk, with jagged soot-colored half-moons that hand underneath your eyes. You look in the mirror expecting to see yourself, but only see the hollow skin of the being that you move through life and mime to be.

Your host wishes it could be different. She desires to rise above the rest without the constant nausea that medication brings. She hates the bruises that all of the needles from blood work leave behind. The woman at LabCorp knows her name and which vein to stick. She's a frequent visitor. If LabCorp had flyer miles, she would be able to get her blood taken for free any time she wanted.

You walk around as if you have everything put together like you are all high and mighty, a flawless queen on her royal throne. Dressed in the finest robes of furs and velvet. Crowned with the sapphires and rubies of a normal life, of possibilities, but in reality, you can't even function properly without constant doctor visits and frequent medication adjustments. Those jewels have no appeal. They are the handcuffs that keep you as a captive. They come in the form of prescriptions and paperwork, unwanted but mandatory. Forget to take them for a day? You find yourself cemented to your bed as if you've grown to be a part of it, and some days it feels as if your bed is the only place you'll ever be able to go. One day you expect vines to grow and trap you to the bed, and that would still be the least of your problems.

26 Confessions of a Chronically Ill Woman: An Abecedarian

Appointments

/ə'pointmənt/

1. I have a special color for my appointments in my planner. Usually, they are written in thick red ink from a Papermate pen that my cousin gave me because although red is my favorite color, it is a warning to myself of what is to come on that given day.
2. I loathe doctor's appointments. Hearing the same thing over and over again drives me crazy.
 - a. Maybe if you just lost some weight.
 - b. It could be hormonal. You're still young.
 - c. Nothing is wrong with you.
 - d. It's all in your head.
 - e. Have you thought about bariatric weight loss surgery?
3. The questions stay in my head for many days after the appointment. They make me question if I am worth the life that I live.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

/ˌbɑdēmas'indeks/

1. I was five years old the first time I was told I was fat.

2. I didn't know how I could be fat at five, although I describe myself as such now. I was bullied and harassed for years by peers because of my weight. Sure, I was a chubby kid, but no one deserves the hell that I went through.
3. Two boys would follow me through the hallway. They had mistaken me for another bigger girl in my grade, that people seemed to think that I had a resemblance to. I didn't see it. Yet, they stomped behind me through the hallway, pretending to stumble, bumping into each other, walls, and lockers as I took long strides to get away from them. I remember going home that day screaming about how much I hated myself. My mom got involved in the situation and got the principal involved. Those boys left me alone after that, but they weren't the only ones bullying me.
4. With each and every doctor's visit that I made, I was consistently told that my issues were due to my weight. Back then I wasn't too overweight. I was always on the bigger side, but was athletic, always adventuring outside or playing sports. To the doctors, I may as well have been sitting on the couch eating nothing but potato chips and shotgunning soda after soda. They recommended diets and cutting certain foods out of my diet before I turned ten years old.
 - a. If not weight, they blamed it on hormones. Something that I wasn't entirely sure of myself.
5. I began to weigh myself obsessively and skip lunch in school, covering my mouth and face when I did eat because I didn't want anyone to realize how disgusting I was. I felt guilty for giving myself the food that my body needed to survive.

6. Hugs were off-limits for me. Any sort of affection was. At twelve and thirteen, I would avoid them whenever possible. I didn't want people to hug me, feel my fat, and therefore be disgusted with me. Although, they could never be as disgusted as I am with myself.
7. I pinched my fat in mirrors, digging nails into my skin, wondering if I took scissors to my extra fat if I would bleed out, but maybe for a minute, I would feel content with how I looked.
8. Body image is still something I struggle with, but I try to focus on other things. It is so hard to maintain weight when your body is crumbling underneath your skin.

Chronic

/'kränik/

1. When I try to explain to someone that I am chronically ill, I get a blank stare as their eyes move up and down to give me a once-over. Chronically ill? What does that even mean?
2. I tell them that I don't feel sick all of the time, but sometimes I do. More often than not I have subtle symptoms from day to day, but there are sometimes when I can't get out of bed or function as a person in society.
3. Funnily enough, I think I say this as a warning.
4. WARNING: Don't get involved with my life if you can't handle frequent cancellations of plans, alternate plans that are definitely not as much fun as the original ones, the long stretches of time that I may have to spend in the bathroom, or the gentle boredom that comes with being my friend.

5. It is hard to be someone who is chronically ill, but sometimes it is even harder to be close to someone who is suffering from chronic illness.

Diagnosis

/ˌdɪəɡˈnɒsəs/

1. I am standing in a police lineup, with that one-way glass sitting across the room in front of me, waiting for the doctor on the other side to hear my voice express my symptoms. I imagine them in their long white coat, an outstretched arm, and an accusing pointer finger focused on me through the glass.
 - a. “That’s her. That’s the girl with x, y, and z.”
2. I feel this way when I go to the doctor’s office too. I sit straight up on the examination table, silently kicking my feet, as the doctor scrolls through their computer, typing something every so often.
 - a. “When was your last period?”
 - b. “Do you smoke or drink?”
 - c. “Have you been taking your medication?”
3. I answer the questions as if I will be shot dead for saying the wrong thing. I then overthink how I answered the doctor’s questions, as they couldn’t care less. They just want to be paid for their job and all those years of schooling.
4. If I were to list everything that I have ever been diagnosed with or misdiagnosed with, I would be able to write a Stephen King novel, that’s for sure.

Excuse

Verb /ik'skyooz,ek'skyooz/, noun /ik'skyoos,ek'skyoos/

1. Everyone looks at me as if I am the bad guy. A liar, a manipulator, a weasel trying to get out of plans that I made. The truth is, I wish I could go. I wish I could live a normal life. I wish normalcy was a pill that I could take, and it would allow every other ailment to vanish, with minimal side effects.
2. I'm sorry is etched in invisible tears on my pillowcase, now dried, as I stare at the ceiling wondering why people choose to love me. I count the ceiling tiles over and over again, listing everything in life that I missed out on so far because of my medical conditions. Dates, dinner with friends, and being able to eat food at all of those proms that I went to. Going out took planning. Way too much planning than I would like to admit. I needed to know the times, so I knew whether or not I could eat that day, or if I would have to fast from the night before. I needed to know bathroom situations. Lengths of car rides. Places that had bathrooms on the way just in case. Pain reliever was a must, and if I was out for the night, I needed to bring a bag to pack all of my medication into. I couldn't just go a night without those. Even when that was all said and done, even with planning, flare-ups occurred and ruined plans.
3. Friends of mine, who have since expired from that title, posted pictures on Snapchat of everyone together. They met up at the Ulster County Fair and hadn't bothered to ask me if I would go. If I could go. That's the thing, if you tell people you are sick just one time to many, then in their head, you are always sick. Unable to go out, unable to live, unable to be anything other than the sick you that survives on naps, hot baths, and extra strength

pain reliever. They think you don't want to hang out with them. They think you don't like them. Meanwhile, the person you like least of all is yourself.

Future

/ˈfyooCHər/

1. As a child, everything seemed so clear. I would finish high school. I would go to college for music or writing. Maybe I'd be in an orchestra on Broadway after having finished my four years at Julliard, and finally, be happy. Maybe I would go to NYU to be a writer as I had always wished. I'd publish novels that teenagers would love and make money to be able to support my family. None of that is true now.
2. I consider myself a writer. Yet, I didn't go to grad school for writing. I went for English instead. I have published poetry and countless interviews with authors who inspire me, but nothing has been considered enough yet. I think not going to Sarah Lawrence because of money and medical conditions will always haunt me. I was good enough to get in there, so I must be good for something. Right?
3. Writing has been the one constant in my life. I began creating stories as a child through playing pretend and exaggerating my life. I filled journals upon journals in school, so many that my first-grade teacher had to tell me to stop writing so that she could have extra journals for the other students who were writing at the pace for my age level. I kept writing. Through sickness, through health, and through everything else writing has been the best friend I have always needed. The one thing that would never give up on me, was because I could write from the safe medical haven of my bed, in waiting rooms, on my

phone as I waited for a doctor to walk in. There was inspiration in everything, and there still is.

Grave

/grāv/

1. The grave is death.
2. The grave is the end.
3. The grave may be the only place where I no longer feel pain, but I'd rather live a full life full of pain than give up on myself permanently. It's hard to want to succeed. To set goals. To want to function in a body as illness laden as my own, but I find a way every day. I find purpose.
4. Purpose in scarlet summer sunsets that casts their beauty over the Shawangunk mountains. Purpose in autumn leaves that come as quickly as they go. The light in his eyes makes me feel at home, that makes my broken body feel whole for once. The color red. My nephews smile. I find meaning in everything around me, a sense of being, and with that, I can continue on as long as these things stay too.

Health

/helTH/

1. If you check my eyesight, hearing, or heart, and that alone, you would think that I am healthy.

2. I wouldn't define myself as all of that though. Imagine the Grim Reaper peering over my shoulder, wondering how I am still managing to hang on.
3. Looking at me I am anything but this. I have dark circles that hang like darkened half-moons underneath my eyes. I look exhausted. My hair is dry. I look tired, and I am incredibly overweight. No one would call me the image of health.
4. My primary doctor tells me that I will be a tough case to crack. I think she finds enjoyment in the amalgamation of illnesses that I suffer from, and I find relief in her kindness and understanding. What we both know is that I am not as healthy as I should be at 23, and neither of us knows the reason why yet.

Inflammation

/,ɪnflə'māSH(ə)n/

1. I am one with the pain that I feel.
2. I don't know how else to describe it, besides that burning ache that I feel in the pit of my stomach right before or during a big flare-up. Nothing can soothe this pain besides rest.
3. In some magical world, inflammation doesn't exist. I can deal with pangs and pings of vicious pain, but this is something that I find myself wishing to be dead over.

Joint

/joint/

1. Joint aches. Joint pain. Joint discomfort. Take it all away. I feel like I can't relax in my own body, because the pain that follows is debilitating.

2. I count the length of pain and cramps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 seconds, only to be gone again. I try to rest within these painless silences, only to be awoken by a pang worse than the original.
3. To wake from a dead sleep, when I had just reached that space of sweet unconsciousness angers me, and I lay still hoping for the pain to subside, staring into the darkness, imagining demons were the ones who had been causing me this misery. I know it is my body attacking itself, and I hope that I don't need to climb out of bed to find one of my bottles of Tylenol.
4. Then I am fine for days at a time, pain nothing but a stranger to the temple of my body. I sit in silence and watch as the walls begin to crumble, and I cannot stand up straight any longer.
 - a. Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust. I find that I am something similar. Pain to pain, and nothing other than that.

Know

/nō/

1. Knowledge was to know what was going wrong within the realm of my body. It was to know what the symptoms that I was feeling were a part of. To know what exactly it was that was punishing me to the realms of my room. Cancer? Some rare disease that I wasn't yet diagnosed with yet? Maybe my vitamin levels were off again. Yet, I search through Google as if it owes me something. Owes me answers that my doctors can't seem to give. Owes me the comfort of a diagnosis, of knowing, no matter how close to death *WebMD* thinks I am to dying. At least, I knew the possibilities.

2. When I was first diagnosed with Graves Disease, I found myself scouring every corner of the medical internet, reading studies and proving my symptoms were accurate. Nearly everything under the symptoms seemed to be a perfect match for me. At that moment, I thought maybe this endocrinologist was onto something. Maybe she would be able to medicate me and fix me so that I would be able to finally live a normal life. Now, looking back, I think that was a lot of pressure to put on one specialist. I am still sick. The doctors still don't know what could be causing me to feel this ill, yet I make lists in my brain of all of the possibilities that Google tells me it could be. Then I would be prepared for the worst-case scenario, and when the other shoe dropped to diagnose me with something else that was life-changing, I would be able to sit there with confidence and know that I knew all along.
3. Not knowing is what is eating me up. Did you know that if you are diagnosed with one autoimmune disease, it is likely that you have more than one? So far, Graves Disease has been the only one that I have been diagnosed with. Yet, I find comfort in the idea of going through a full body scan to see what lights up on the images, because then at least I will know what is going on.
4. Graves Disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, Paranasal Retention Cyst, Pituitary Cyst, Hyperprolactinemia, Morbid Obesity, Goiter, Breast fibroadenoma, Anxiety, Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is known.

Lethargic

/lə'THärjik/

1. Caffeine was made for the likes of me. Maybe that's why I can drink a cup of coffee some days and not feel a single thing. On other days I drink Monster energy drinks to stay awake. To get done the things that have been building up on my to-do lists for what seems like weeks now.
2. If sleepiness was a chronic condition, I would diagnose myself with that among the other illnesses and issues that run amuck in my head. I sit and wonder how many hours of sleep that I need to be human again.
 - a. Two and three hours, eleven and twelve, deeper and deeper into my REM cycle I delve. Yet, I find myself tired no matter what I do.
 - b. Reading books that my psychiatrist recommended to me as I get ready for bed. Cutting myself off of caffeine at a normal hour, and getting off my phone. Nothing works to help me fall asleep besides the anti-anxiety medication I was prescribed.

Medication

/,medə'kāSH(ə)n/

1. Methimazole, Spironolactone, Polyethylene Glycol, Fluoxetine, Vitamins B, C, and D, a multivitamin, Trazodone, Junel Fe, Metformin, Fish Oil, Trulicity.
2. Take away the Methimazole– your thyroid levels are fine.
3. Up the Trazodone to 100mg, so you can sleep at night.
4. Anxiety and Depression love to play their games with you, so let's up that dosage too.

5. I took myself off of the Trulicity. Something about injecting myself with a needle in my stomach every week to lose the stubborn weight that clung to my skeleton wasn't worth it.
6. Spironolactone to help with your PCOS, oh, and Metformin too. Then when you are finally doing well and are seeing improvements in your reproductive health, let's yank you off of that Spironolactone. Painful periods are not caused by PCOS, after all.
7. Let's load you up on these pills, then expect you to be you.

Nerves

/nɜrvs/

1. I feel the jittery jitters of anxiety running through my veins as if each ounce of it is on a racehorse and my body is an endless racetrack with a 24-hour sign pasted to my forehead.
2. I play with my fingers, pick at my nails, bite the skin away from my lip, and can't sit still in a chair. I have to be constantly on the move. Every hobby I have is a constant motion.
3. I play video games, write, and crochet. All of these are hand-demanding and keep me moving enough to not let the anxious thoughts get the best of me.
 - a. I say that I like to create, but maybe I like to distract myself from the thoughts going on in my head and the pain that I feel. If I keep moving I will never have time to think. Save thinking for sleeping, where the harms of the subconscious world can't harm me other than through my dreams.
4. I dream vividly and sense everything that happens in them. Sometimes I find myself questioning the connection between my dreams and reality because it all feels the same to

me. I know when I'm dreaming and I know when I'm awake, but non-reality seems to slip into my daily life, like a trickster, waiting for me to slip up which is real.

Observe

/əb'zərv/

1. I sit on benches and watch people live the life that I wish I could. I'd hit the streets and walk for miles checking out every shop on a single strip of land, without feeling the urge to stop.
 - a. I can see myself healthy, dressed up in the ways that I have always wanted to dress, seeing the world, and traveling at the drop of a hat. Being more than I can ever be now.
2. Social media teases me with the allure of clubbing. Just the thought of it. I am much too introverted to be in the partying scene.
3. My friends are aging and I think of all of the time I have lost with them because my body has chosen to give up on me time and time again. I wish that I could have that time back. Those moments back, and the memories of all of the things that I wasn't able to do here in my lonely heart.
4. I question why he wants to be with me when his heart is so full of wanderlust and he could go so many places in life without me. He tells me he's in love with me, and the only thing he'd love more than to travel is to experience life with me by his side. Strangely enough, he doesn't hate me when I get sick and doesn't give up on me when I've made promises to go somewhere with him, but can't keep them quite yet.

- a. We always tell each other there is time. There is another day. Another day is another chance. In my mind, I wonder when another day will come when I am feeling well enough to be able to come and go as I please.

Pharmacy

/ˈfɑːrməsē/

1. I am the only person that I know who needs to get a shopping bag after visiting the pharmacy.
2. Visiting the pharmacy is never a simple trip. Usually, I have to wait for them to fill and get all of my scripts together, but I don't complain. It gives me time to find the hidden wonders of CVS monthly.
3. I refer to the one pharmacist technician as the "nice one." He is a large man with a beard and some pretty cool tattoos. He definitely looks like he plays Dungeons & Dragons, and that makes me want to be friends with him.
4. When I call to ensure that my medication is being refilled, I mouth along the sentences that the phone robot says before she lets me dial the numbers to speak to a pharmacy representative.
5. I wouldn't be surprised if the phone robot called me on my birthday to wish me a good one, since I've entered those same numbers into her system more times than I can count

...7 3 1 1 9 9 9...

Quilt

/kwilt/

1. Look at me, for I am a dilapidated quilt of prescriptions, pill bottles, and diagnoses.
2. No one other than me can see this absurdly majestic quilt, as it is dressed my bones as my flesh, and looks just like the skin that I typically am clothed in.
3. The quilt is me, and I just want to strip it of its stitches and make it as I see it in my image.

Reproduction

/,rēprə'dækSH(ə)n/

1. There was this one time when this very weird emergency room doctor seemed to think that I was okay and that the symptoms that I was feeling were something of my imagination. He told me that my urine sample and blood work showed absolutely nothing. He mentioned a CT scan... then told me he wouldn't order it.
 - a. BECAUSE I WAS OF MY PRIME REPRODUCTIVE AGE AND TOO MUCH RADIATION CAN AFFECT MY ABILITY TO REPRODUCE.
2. I lay in that hospital bed and imagined myself strangling this man with his own stethoscope and wondered how someone like him could ever become a doctor. I wondered how this was my first time hearing this excuse.
 - a. PROTECT THE HYPOTHETICAL BABIES!!!
 - b. Let the carrier suffer. It is her given right.

Symptom

/'sim(p)təm/

1. I am a hypochondriac, so I question if any new pain or new feeling is a symptom of the newest disease that may just have the potential to take me out.
2. Pings, pangs, cramps, aches, muscle spasms, stomach issues, headaches, migraines, coughs, and sore throats.
3. What will be the symptom that kills me?
4. My search history on Google is composed of primary things that are associated with me trying to figure out what illness I have today.
 - a. The Bubonic Plague? Cancer? Maybe Sepsis?
5. I know my brain isn't always the right thing to rely on. I obsess too much over the tiniest thing but I guess the bright side to all of this is knowing all of the possibilities at hand.

Test

/test/

- | | | |
|---------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. MRI | X-RAYS | ULTRASOUNDS |
| CT SCAN | BLOOD TESTS | |
| IVS | HOSPITALS | DOCTORS |
| NEEDLES | NURSES | |
| FASTING | SCRIPTS | MEDICATION |

Ultrasound

/'ʌltrə,sound/

1. The truth is that I would rather have my blood taken a million times over than have one of these done. I'd rather be forced into the head cage that I wore when I had my brain MRI than feel that warm gooey liquid anywhere on my skin.
2. Afterward is the worst, because no matter how much you wipe away the goo with the towel that the ultrasound technician gives you, the sensation still lingers.
3. I think the only way to no longer feel the goo on your skin is to rip your skin off.

Vaccine

/vak'sēn, 'vak_sēn/

1. Uncertainty. That was all that I could feel when news of COVID-19 reached me. I knew something was coming. It was all a part of the cycle of human sickness, but I didn't know that it was something that would affect me so much. I was considered immunocompromised, so when my undergraduate institution shut down in February 2020, I clung to the confines of my home, daring not to leave. Death clung to the town I lived in. It took so many people, including the owner of the only bar in town. It was dangerous, and I was at a high risk of getting something that had the potential to kill me.
2. I fear death. I feared death even more during the beginning of the pandemic as I saw the death tolls climb. Higher and higher to the point of medical genocide, as government officials told us that everything would be okay.
3. Before they were able to get the vaccination, my family was stricken with COVID-19, and missed my undergraduate commencement. I sat in the stands, a mask strapped to my face as I looked toward the crowd knowing that no one was there to watch me get my

diploma. To greet me afterward and take pictures with me. Yet, I sat there, immunocompromised wondering how I wasn't sick. Wondering how I made it here, over a year into the pandemic.

4. I made sure to get vaccinated as soon as I could. Since I was immunocompromised I was able to get the vaccine fairly quickly through a vaccination clinic at my college. In our gym, they had line-up tables in the center, horizontally, with a single medical physician at each. Our temperatures were checked as we came into the room. Then we were given a vaccination card that was prefilled without names, information, and a sticker. There were forms that we had to print out and fill out beforehand, which were then examined in detail. For nearly an hour I waited in that line to be able to be vaccinated, each person six feet apart from the one in front of them. We were a masked gaggle of college students and community members who desired nothing more than to be able to be protected from the unknown effects of COVID-19. As it was my turn I walked over to the table, and handed the health worker my paperwork. She asked me if I was immunocompromised, and once I told her that I was, that I had Graves Disease, the unmasked part of her face twisted in confusion. She asked me to hold on for a second while she went and consulted the woman who was in charge of the clinic that was being held. That woman came over, and probed me about my condition, then injected me with the vaccination. There was an aching burning sensation that shot through my arm that was incomparable to the needle. I was far too used to those from previous bloodwork, yet it was almost like I could feel the vaccine as it flooded through my muscles, attempting to give me some sort of immunity that my body didn't have on its own. She told me that I would have to sit there longer than the average student.

Weakness

/'wɛknəs/

1. Never have I ever needed to sit on the floor of the shower to bathe because I couldn't hold myself up long enough to shower normally.
2. Never have I ever had to call for my mom to aid me down the stairs so I wouldn't be stuck in my room all day.
3. Never have I ever had my legs give out from under me, sending me falling in whichever direction my body deemed most appropriate.
4. Never have I ever slept for an entire day because I felt so exhausted from sleeping.
5. Never have I ever had to cancel my life for a day to lay in my bed, wrapped in blankets, so I could rest and regain my strength for the following day.
6. Never have I ever just wanted to fade away on my mattress and pretend that I didn't exist anymore.
7. Never have I ever...
8. Never have I....
9. Never have...
10. Never...
11. Have I?

X-ray

/'ɛks,rā/

1. I wonder how many times I have been X-rayed throughout the course of my life. All of the times I've hurt a leg, an arm, the stomach pain that I have felt, and all of the times that I haven't been taken seriously until a doctor had defeatedly decided to put me through imaging.
2. If you look at my body in x-ray mode. I am afraid of what you will find. Will all of my cysts light up my body like a Christmas tree? Will there be a sullen surprise waiting within, that could be the answer to my symptoms? Hell, maybe there will be nothing found, and the thing that is healthiest about my body, my bones, will shine through.
3. Maybe those bones will prove to me I am something other than hurt. Something other than pain. Something other than a stomach full of medication each morning and every night.
4. Bones would be the least of my worries. At least I know they are there.

Yield

/yēld/

1. I don't know when to stop, so I just keep pushing myself until I can no longer stand on my own two feet. When I am feeling well this is a dangerous cycle. I feel that I need to overcompensate for all of the days that I haven't been able to do anything.
2. Doing nothing drives me crazy. I can feel the noise around me chattering through my ears, reaching my eardrums, then staying within the realms of my brain. I feel the constant need to keep going. To keep doing something. To keep creating.

3. People tell me to relax, and the truth is I don't know how to. The green light in my brain is constantly on, and I am racing through each light, hoping not to reach red anytime soon. The more I do now, the less I will have to do later.
4. The yield sign pops up in the center of my vision, and my eyes focus directly on this sign, going forward at full speed. To yield is to slow down. Slowing down now will cause me to crash, and when I crash I can be out for a few days. I tell myself it is the opposite day as I press my subconscious foot down on the gas pedal to my brain, speeding to unrecognizable limits. To slow is to crash, to speed is to succeed.
 - a. I don't remember gas as an element in the equation, and as I coast, running on fumes, craving rest, I make myself go because I know what is to come. One of those spiky speed bumps that you never see coming.
 - b. When my tires are popped, I feel misery. No sense of relief, as my body melds with pain, and the two become one, as my brain has to rest in the autobody shop for a few days until it is in a drivable condition once again.

Zenith

/'zēnəTH/

1. I have never been as strong as I am now. Regardless of mental illness or physical illness. I am moving forward and trying to create the best life for myself. There is something admirable about that.

enough pill bottles to look like a traffic cone highway

my dresser traffic is directed
by copious amounts of ugly
orange medication bottles,
looking as if I run my own
pharmacy from the safety
of my own bed.

i've said those names over
time and time again to make
sure that during my next
doctor visit, I can recite them
all and their allocated doses.

my brain cycles on a schedule,
trying to remember if I took
that pill or the other one that
looks exactly like it.

why do they all look the same?

twice a day I take them by the handful

washing them down my throat
to the pit of my stomach,
where they will make me feel
as if I am going to puke them up
Along with every single one before.

i am 23 and I cannot leave home
without my rattling pillbox full
of the life support that the
pharmaceutical companies
have to offer my
body.

i make a joke that I won't live
past 30, and as the pill bottles
begin to increase
even further in number,
the joke becomes reality.

just another wave of pain waiting to take me under

I wish not to feel

the symptoms

that are

d

r

a

g

g

i

n

g

me

u

n

d

e

r

the torrents of chronic restless waves

a wish to be something other than

pain

invisible

numb

maybe even the least likely of all

HEALTHY

Health repels from me like

u b r g u
r b e and l e

whatever health I have has run out

from the exhaustion of waging wars

with my

c

o

l

l

a

p

s

i

n

g

body

I suffer

pings and pangs

cramps and aches

headaches and migraines

so much more

...

yet here I am

pieces of my fractured self glued together with

the slew of

medication

I

MUST

TAKE.

Bodies Want Breaks

Body wants sleep

Body wants no eat

Body wants no breathe

Body wants to end

Body wants to pretend

Body wants break

Body wants dead

Body wants peace

Body wants to work

Body wants no hurt

Body wants fixing

Body wants happiness

Body wants

Body wa-

Body-

Bo-

...

hand sanitizer-scented waiting rooms

infiltrate the hairs in my nasal cavity
burning alcohol memories into
my sinuses as if my mandatory
mask didn't exist.

I pivot and shift, kicking my
feet quietly as I wait for a name
that I'd rather not recognize
to be called by a sterile scrubbed
nurse from a doorway next to
the registration desk.

And I know where that door-portal
leads to judgment, diagnoses,
more medication to mountain up
In the pits of my guts, burning
away from sour stomach acid.

The same nurse from last month
peeks her head between the door and frame

"Samantha?"

and the cycle begins again.