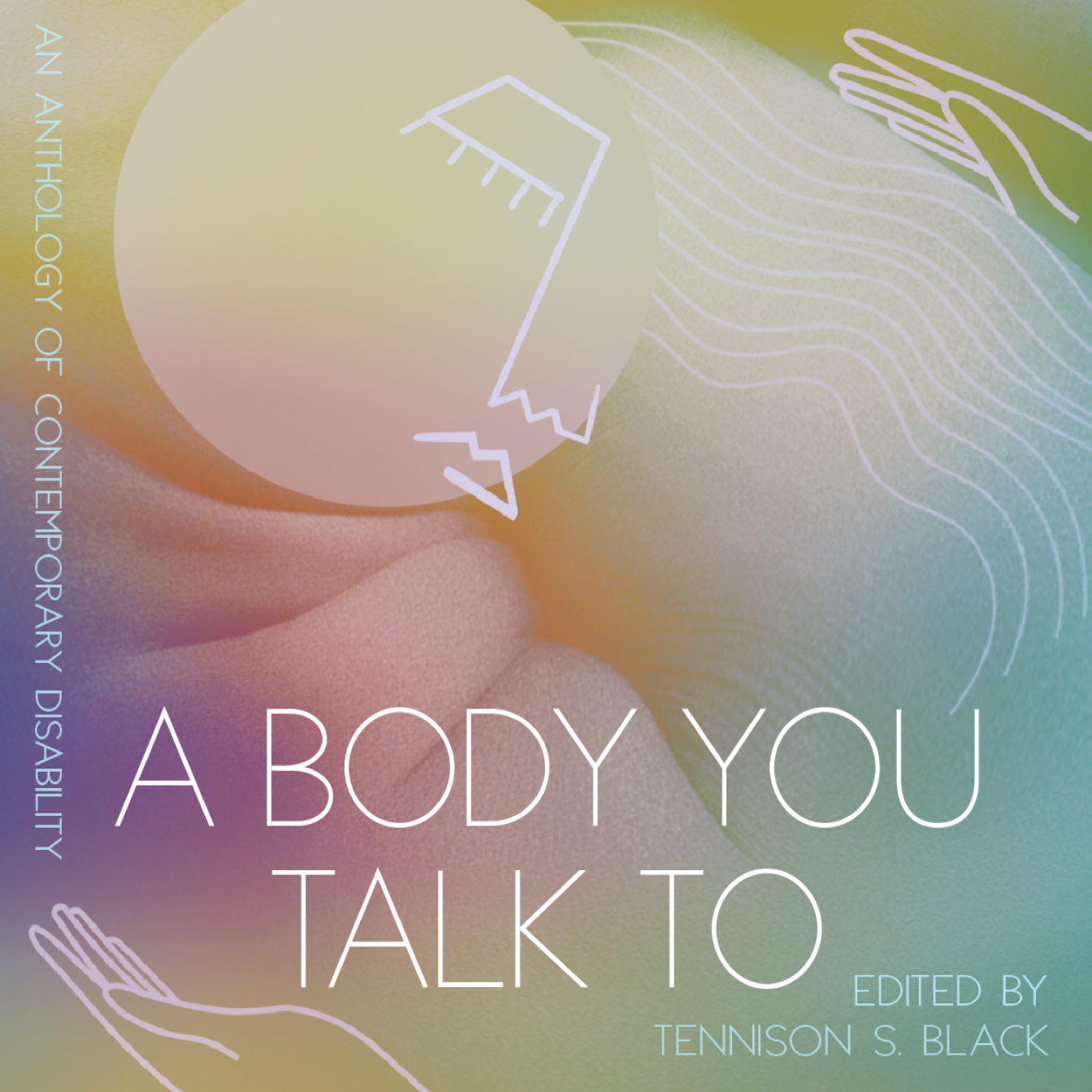


AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY DISABILITY

A BODY YOU TALK TO

EDITED BY
TENNISON S. BLACK



A Body You Talk To
An Anthology of Contemporary Disability

Sundress Publications • Knoxville, TN

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ISBN: 978-1-951979-46-1

Published by Sundress Publications

www.sundresspublications.com

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Table of Contents

COLLEEN ABEL Fallen Caryatid Carrying Her Stone	10
OWÓLABI ABOYADE ER Sestina	11
PARISA AKHBARI You Choose	13
LATIF ASKIA BA On Spasms (an oxbow)	15
JOANNA WYNNE BARNETT Oh, you want a later curfew?	16
SUSAN BARRY-SCHULZ Disorder of Cranial Nerve V	19
MEGAN BENT I Live In Crip Time	21
LAURA ADRIENNE BRADY Concessions	23
CORI BRATBY-RUDD The nothing known as stranger on a plane	25

SARAH BROWNING pain	27
MUGABI BYENKYA Seizures	28
JODY CHAN being against the couple-form	29
LANE CHASEK Tom Green and the Bunker	30
MARLENA CHERTOCK I split this body	33
EMILY ROSE COLE On Being My Own Wife	34
GEMMA COOPER-NOVACK Immunesuppression	35
STEVEN CORDOVA Two Addicts & a Cat	36
TARIK DOBBS nub	37

KARA DORRIS Wilderness as History Lesson	38
ANGIE EBBA bone stars	40
STACY J. ESTEP I Am My Own Avatar	41
AHJA FOX Octopus	43
CATHERINE GARBINSKY Migraine with Aura	46
DAVID GREENSPAN Frank Grimes [a love poem]	47
PHYLLIS HEMANN Where Not to Go in a Pandemic	49
KAREN HEAD unmade	50
EMILY HOOVER Let's Be Like the Internet	52
RACHAEL IKINS Halfway/Passages	54

NATALIE E. ILLUM Morse Code	55
JEN KARETNICK Echo with Pandemic	56
JOSEPHINE RAYE KELLY Bipolar Not Otherwise Specified	57
FRANCES KLEIN The Artist is Tired	58
ANNA. LEAHY midbrain	60
DANIELLE LEMAY Best Seats in the House	61
RAYMOND LUCZAK Autobiography Self Story True	63
CAMILLE MCDANIEL Erasure of the Affirmation	64
ELIZABETH MEADE Questions for My Medication	66

ELENA MINOR Your Body Wakes	67
BRIAR RIPLEY PAGE Things are Looking Up, Baby!	69
ELLEN PECKHAM Beggar Breakfast	71
CARA PETERHANSEL What it Means to Say Mania	73
SUZANNE S. RANCOURT The Many Ways to Drown	75
HEIDI ANDREA RESTREPO RHODES the dream (the bed)	77
ZACH SEMEL when i dissociate, all cis-men sound like batman	79
TEO SHANNON Vertigo	81
SANCHARI SUR surface bloom	83
CHANIKA SVETVILAS The Unchosen	84

AÏCHA MARTINE THIAM Étude III: Halfway Through The Script	86
LOURDES TUTAINE-GARCIA The Green Woman	88
HABEEBULLAHI MUHAMMED YUNUSA (BAŞÖRUN) these days, i hold pep talks with my body, where i paraphrase / all my disabilities	90
About the Authors	93
Reprint Credits	104
About the Editor	106

Fallen Caryatid Carrying Her Stone
after Rodin

I thought I was done with this:
the darkness birthed from its crèche of thunder

Thought I was done when that year
was over and I threw away

the rug the cat had killed the mouse on
the bright compass of its blood

When I threw away the one record
I'd played nonstop, the woman wailing

When I placed the new bottle on the bathroom shelf
Child-proof cap my name my address

But here I am, taking up the stone again
And from a distance no one can see

Which is the stone and which is my back

Which is the body and which the burden

ER Sestina

I survived childhood by polishing secrets, sharing
them only in case of affection, emergency.
I remember I used to count my friends
on a single hand, the same hand that would wipe my bleeding
would wave good bye forever, would finish
a novel in a day or two. My eyes racing

through fiction like men in careless cars racing
up our neighborhood blocks. I 've had my share
of close calls, nights when I thought I was finished
with life. My wife at-the-time would scream emergency
if I were wheezing or exhausted or bleeding.
Now I'm held by a web of old friends.

Like Joe, who answered his phone like a friend
when my heart was skipping and racing.
After twenty two years we were closer than blood.
On the ride to the hospital he shared
with me how his tears emerged
when his wife at-the-time said they were finished.

He said I could call when the doctors were finished
and knew why my heart was prowling like a fiend
in my chest. Prowling like a virus that emerges
from jungles to spread fear among the human race.
We wore masks in the small car so the only things shared
were stories of men whose hearts slapped and wept blood.

Everyone falls tired when internally bleeding
Or when forever actually holds a start and finish.
Me, I constantly held back and didn't learn to share
until I sat in my lonely apartment mourning a friend
who was a driver, an engineer, a mechanic in the race.
My rusty hooptie always having some sort of emergency.

I'm still waiting to be admitted, a wry smile emerges,
this heart raw, lung aching, thick lips bleeding.
I remember when I used to disappear without a trace
and wait quietly for unpleasantness to finish.
Now I check on myself like a trusted friend
"Bro, is there something that you want to share?"

"Nah, I'm finished. It ain't no emergency"
As poems drip blood all over my friends.
I'll share my process: I write five words and erase six.

You Choose

In the dark room, the white nurse's hands part your gown, sweeping over your breasts. "You aren't Hispanic?" Her hands hook electrodes to your skin as she asks the question.

You falter. Having a heart condition, this EKG ritual is routine by now, but the question is not. The nurse ran through her rote list before you stripped down, the familiar *Weight? Height? Using a seatbelt? Still a nonsmoker?* You wonder if this is another medical query, one that slipped her mind earlier.

"No." You train your eyes to the ceiling when her cold fingers find your ribcage.

"What are you?"

The question always grates you. The *What*. *What* is object or animal, a different species, beyond the human *who*. It invokes images of old anthropology, the racist rank-ordering of skulls from ape to Anglo. *What* hunts disabled people of color at both heels: *What are you* and *What's wrong with you*. You learned early on that people stare because they want to pin you to an answer, to put their finger on the *what*. But they've already decided: *What you are is wrong*.

"Iranian American," you say. It took time to find the words that fit. Words that didn't fragment. In Farsi you are called *do rageh*, two-veined. American mother, Iranian father. You searched for something sounding whole. Not *half-white*, *half-Persian*, as if you could choose a side. Inhabit a split body.

Disabled took its sweet time in fitting, too. But now it wraps around you, generous with belonging and community.

No matter the terms, people revel in reminding you of your otherness. *Iranian American, Disabled*; these words cohere your two veins in a way the outside world cannot.

"Oh." The nurse hovers above the EKG machine, eyeing the feed of heart rhythm. "Why don't you wear...the head-thing?"

There is more unasked in her voice than you can answer.

"Hijab," you clarify, as if the term matters to her. It matters to you.

You don't allow yourself to be surprised by the question. This is the nurse who, when you complimented her snowman scrubs in wintertime, squared her jaw and responded *I'm not afraid to say Merry Christmas to you*. You can tell that she prides herself in being different from people like you. And she answers

the phone at your doctor's office. Sees that your prescriptions get refilled. Schedules the urgent appointments. You need her.

Your eyes harden. In the dusky room, one fluorescent lamp pitches light up the underside of her face, shadows carving out hollows in the jaw and temple. Her eyes blaze, bleached, tracking the EKG screen. Maybe this is what a polygraph feels like. You want to ask if EKGs chart the chronic stress of moments like this. Maybe your heart leaves evidence of these kinds of unquantifiable insults.

A rush of responses brims inside. Tell her that not all Iranian Americans are Muslim. That not all Muslim women wear hijab. That as a queer woman, Islam evokes a tangle of complicated feelings, of culture and sacredness and fear, of your Bibi jaan bending in prayer, of your father whispering Qu'ran verse into your ear at bedtime, of queer Iranian boys' bodies strung from rope. Tell her that a headscarf bears no relevance to your heart exam. That your teeth ache from conversations like these. From gritting your mouth shut.

There are no soft places to land. "It's a choice," you say. "A personal choice."

You want to find something in her face—the twinges of the brow, the jag of the lower lip—to hold onto. "Almost done." Her hands gather pages of your heart rhythm. When she finishes, you detach the electrode clamps yourself. Peel the stick backing from your skin, wrap the gown around your chest again.

You dress from the pile of discarded clothes. Exit to the lobby, head spinning from the light. In the waiting room, a stack of half-sheet comment cards reads, "Caught in the Act of Caring: Catch One of Our Staff Doing a Great Job."

The options are always the same. Call out the nebulous moment, her hands on your exposed skin, the word *What*, the fracturing you felt, and risk the wrath of a nurse icing you out of your healthcare. Gamble on another doctor unfamiliar with your case, or swallow the moment and move on. You choose.

On Spasms (an oxbow)

you again. you've woken me up
at five-forty-some thing in the morning.
you're a big baby; except i could never
love you. and even if i did, i would never admit it. yeah,
i'm as petty as you. you think i can't b— anyway,
forget it. you're much too stupid
to argue with. incredibly stupid. you put all the accents
in all the wrong places; you try to make me in to you;
you confuse *grave* with *aguda* and
esdrújula with *sobresdrújula* like a francophone
using *that* for *it*. try explaining the diff— nevermind,
you know what i mean. and at least the French are lovable. you
are not, or at least, not by me. the doctors try to get ri—
i laugh. they don't know you are ir reducible. they don't
know how many times i've sat you on my doorstep
and waited for some one to take you.
a stranger comes along to look and imply
they say, "there is nothing wrong
with you." they say, "you are beautiful, electric, and wild."
"take it then," i say. "have it then," i say. "try to love it then,"
i say. they don't take you, they don't have you. they don't really love.
they shut their mouths. they close their eyes. they walk away.

Oh, you want a later curfew?

As a girl child
I was taught
Women don't get angry
We get agreeable

As a disabled child
I was taught
Nothing will ever be accessible
Unless you demand it

So from the beginning
My identities were in conflict

To be a successful disabled person
I was supposed to always be assertive
To be a successful woman
I was supposed to never be assertive

The conditioning of womanhood won out
Because whenever someone tells me to sit out of something
As they've decided it's easier to discriminate than to find a way to include the disabled
I sit out
Quiet, obliging

Usually, when this happens
The person running the activity tells me in a whisper, horrified
And because I know that their desire to not feel even a little bad trumps my needs

I say
'That's OK'
'I understand'
'We're all good'

I always figured they were whispering because they didn't want me to be embarrassed
Except, if they really cared about my feelings
They'd find a way for me to participate
They don't care about my feelings
They just want to be able to forget I exist

I know that the moment when they sideline me
Is the moment I need to assert myself
To insist on accessibility
But the reticence drilled into me as a girl shouts in my head:
How dare I ask them to alter their behavior for my benefit?
I am so eager to demure
To tell them
'It's OK'
'I understand'
'We're all good'
But when I do that
When I vomit ingrained politeness
I choke on the shame of failing to advocate for myself
Even if that advocacy will do nothing

Because if someone wants to discriminate
I cannot stop them
But if they do discriminate
They can stew in the discomfort of being a trash human being
It's not OK
We're not good

I don't understand

It is not my job to make you feel better about excluding me

Disorder of Cranial Nerve V.

Going on
ten years now
Trigeminal Neuropathy
a mouthful of stinging

wasps trapped inside
my right cheek
up against the roof
along the sublingual space below
from gum to lip

a prickling swath
swept over the cheekbone
like angry
Covergirl blush
tongue burning hotter
as the hours pass

dull-skulled and tongue-
tripped by evening
I don
the soft fleece hood I wear
against the wind

*you seem to focus
on the physical symptoms
a lot says my therapist.*

I laugh, tell her

how much better
I've been lately. Submit
the required paperwork. Wonder
how much I'll be

reimbursed
for the work
of this smile.

I Live In Crip Time



10. *I Live In Crip Time*, 2021
Chlorophyll print on hosta leaf

Artist's Statement

In March of 2020, my fear of catching the coronavirus became palpable. “Don’t worry,” an acquaintance assured me, “only the sick and elderly will die.”

I am chronically ill and immunocompromised. *I Don't Want To Paint A Silver Lining Around It* is my personal reflection on being high risk in the pandemic. It is also my response to the outside world's demand that disabled people be acceptable losses for personal convenience or corporate profit.

Through chlorophyll printing, which uses UV light to print photographic images directly onto leaves, I connect disability and nature to claim disability as a valuable part of human diversity.

Chlorophyll prints (where one print/exposure may take anywhere from 8- 72 hours) are created through a cooperative relationship with the organic materials and the environment. It is a process that celebrates care, interdependence, slowness, and adaptability—values of belonging I find in the disability community.

The fact that chlorophyll prints are impermanent, and will continue to decay over time, underscores the interdependence and bodily impermanence we all share.

Concessions

after Viktor E. Frankl

If lost, the camp counselor instructs, *you must wait to be found*. My friends and I nod and then howl, eager to scatter, make mischief like puppies. I will

always recall this advice and have not yet found it to be true. In st/illness I draw myself closer—every extra limb falls away, fingers

gone to roots, bones turned to stone. When they gather my hair decades later, they will laugh, let it go, embarrassed. *This is no woman—*

just fallen usnea. Even if I vibrate and shake, and bluebirds erupt from my chest, still I will not be seen. I have stopped believing anyone

can offer me a cure I do not already carry. I outstretch my hands and they remain empty. The map writes itself from the direction I turn—distant routes

crumble like fallen tunnels; choices split like ripe peaches and new ones emerge in their place. Always the beetles march in, waving the banners of hunger.

There is beauty to make from rot and shards, from golden bees that crawl from nostrils and ears, trailing honey. Every bit of sweetness in this world

matters. I once traveled all the way to the northern-most edge to remember the look of love on my parents' faces. The last choice I have is the song I sing to myself.

The nothing known as stranger on a plane

There's a little girl alone on a plane
& she sits next to a man who does
not touch her.

This is called a dream. Or
a redo. Or a fallacy.

In this scenario the little girl has
the window seat. One palm, flat and stretched, dances
& she mimics the movement
of the plane, of
her body.

The girl's other hand is pressed
to the window as they
go through clouds and over the sea.

It's like a book. It's made for children.

She feels possibility. Looking down
she imagines a whale about to dive. Imagines a sea
urchin. Imagines what the air will taste like
where she lands.

The man sits next to her & the two are neutral
the way objectivity
pretends to be. Neutral like a church wafer

bought in bulk as a snack.
& they just sit there
like they were supposed to. Like the movies say
they were supposed to.
hands in in his own lap
like he is supposed to.
& when they land, the girl is still smiling

like she is supposed to.

pain

curves the hand
 toward *must I*
each task burden
 beyond

even love, bent on
 ease
 seems a taking

fat sparrows twit on thin
 winter twigs
 out the window

pain pains itself
 with itself
cedes strength to its cousin
 time

how round it goes, pain
how round to no
 where but its hand fall

Seizures

familiar

safe

I hate them

yet they are oddly comfortable

they are a cocoon

I'm a caterpillar incapable of becoming a butterfly

Push through?

Or rest?

being against the couple-form

I expected wilted lavender, windows
without faces. imagining a future
versus clinging to one. I've learned
there is a difference. the train running
late, my phone an archive of apologies
for absence. I miss you. have you been
kind to yourself today. happiness was simple
and perilous. a pear tree, a protest, a fistful
of pages. I filled the margins with verbs.
yield. invert. infect. language invented
to describe how they changed me, as when
we practiced refusing. I will not pay
for entry. I will let failure get involved.
desire is stateless, but distance was
always laughing. how long the wait,
and ambivalent, I waited. we only came
when we were touching ourselves.

Tom Green and the Bunker

My coworker's grandmother refused to wear a mask. She went on vacation in Georgia in June and died in July. My coworker couldn't cry about her grandmother's death, so she laughed instead. Tragedy or comedy: she had two choices.

Everything felt monumental and, at the same time, intimate that year. I wondered which of my breaths could infect someone miles away, if someone else's breath would kill me or someone I loved. Coyotes, foxes, and deer reclaimed vacant roads. I felt the weight of each of my breaths, the terrifying vulnerability of the body. I abandoned the world, secluded myself within my apartment walls, turned to the world of Tom Green. I held my face-blind face to a mirror, imitating the laughter I observed on-screen. A jester in plaid, making a fool out of himself for our amusement.

✱

The Tom Green Show, *Freddy Got Fingered*, the interviews, MTV specials, the podcasts—I watched every piece of Tom Green media I could find.

I can't remember the 90s (I was born in 1994), but I didn't want nostalgia—I wanted an escape, mediated experience.

When I watched old episodes of *The Tom Green Show*, I was struck by how primitive and juvenile his brand of humor was. Harassing strangers, interrupting children's soccer games, building frozen food forts in a grocery store—it wasn't comedy gold, but it would suffice. It was fitting, given the state of the world. Green's comedy was a comedy of social disruption.

✱

Disease and death aren't (usually) funny.

When my stepmother almost died of breast cancer, no one laughed.

In 2020, many of us (too many) became all too aware of how fragile life is, how easily it can be disrupted. No laughing matter.

Yet somehow, in 2000, when Tom Green was diagnosed with testicular cancer, he found a way to turn personal tragedy into a comedy special for national television. *The Tom Green Cancer Special* is equal parts comedy and *memento mori*.

In one scene, Green eats dinner at an upscale restaurant with Drew Barrymore and his family when a fan approaches Green and tells him how much he admires Green's work. Green shakes the fan's hand, tells him that, in a few days, he's going under the knife. Green cackles loudly, maniacally. The fan stares nervously. Green is the only one laughing, and he knows it. There's vulnerability to this laughter, a fear of death and a fear of the loneliness each of us face as physical beings in an indifferent universe. It's a laugh I tried to replicate, failing every time.

✱

This was a year of hermitage. In the town I call home, I found myself forgetting about lockdowns and quarantines because, as an autistic adult, I thrive in isolation. I spent days locked in my apartment, consumed by freelance work, watching *The Tom Green Show*. The weight of months, the burdens of our bodies, the laughter we believed was medicinal: it soon ceased to mean anything.

✱

Tom Green is older now, graying. I feel ancient watching this (presumably) wiser Green shooting a video from his home in April 2020. Green is a cancer survivor, high-risk. He spends most of his time indoors. In this 1 ½-hour video, he shows us how to make a pizza. On the couch behind him lies a ventriloquist's dummy, a surgical mask placed over its nose and mouth, staring past Green's shoulder toward the audience.

"Now cut the peppers into strips," he says, slicing a green bell pepper. "Rinse the seeds out. Gotta make sure you get those seeds out."

Where's the joke? I don't think there is one. This is a video of a man surviving, nothing more and nothing less.

✱

There's comedy, tragedy, and loneliness. There's little distinction between the three, but ultimately, those are the three options we're faced with.

Tom Green has left his home in the city and taken to the deserts of the American Southwest, just north of the U.S.-Mexico border. He lives out of a van, recording videos of himself playing guitar, taking hikes with his dog, and conversing with the frizzy-haired dummy we saw in his pizza-making video. He dresses like a cowboy, wears his graying hair down to his shoulders. Green has distilled isolation into identity, a lifestyle.

He leans against his rusted van, has a heartfelt conversation with his dog and dummy as they all look out over an arid field of cacti and tumbleweeds.

There's no joke here. Loneliness is all Tom Green ever had. It's all any of us have ever had.

I split this body

after "Big Buddy" by Langston Hughes

I split my body in two—
 one always straining,
 the other tough as

this rock. My body is my rock
 and hard place.

Stand by it. Don't doubt my body,
 nurture it like a picky succulent.

my side always aches—boulders
 stacked on bones, granite
 in my ribcage. My body takes,
 gives so much more.

On Being My Own Wife

I take her mostly *for poorer*, but remind her how rich we are in friends. We are forever *in sickness*. We're chronic. But doesn't that mean, I soothe her as we scour our only soup pot, that we're also, from a more enlightened perspective, *in health*, too? Besides, *health* is a highly subjective metric anyway, and don't all bodies require

regular maintenance? When she cries after the MRI, after the visual field test, after the yearly checkup's unsilver news, after the medical bills mob our mailbox and her breath staggers like a twice-shot deer, I take the special-occasion tea leaves down from the cabinet she can't reach without a place to step. I'm careful in my preparation. I know how strong she likes it, and that the bluebird mug is her secret favorite.

We curl on the couch. Steam touches our face like the crook of a finger. And when she asks, like she always does, in her spooked-antelope voice, *shouldn't I have someone?*, I hold her mug, our hands joining over the bird's spread wings, and say, with more certainty each passing year, *honey girl, you have me.*

Immunesuppression

A Sonnet for Going Backwards

The puncture wounds from IVs weeks ago,
the scraped-up calf, the bruise behind my knee,
the scabs of pimples just below my ear
—recovery is mercilessly slow
(and should they go, I move so carelessly,
it's not a day before they'd reappear).
One glance across my body will reveal
the piercings now gone bloodily awry,
the painful cyst high on my inner thigh,
the oozing cuts refusing to congeal.
These and the parts that cloth and flesh conceal
—intestines in distress, cunt overdry—
make clear that it won't matter if I try;
my body's lost, unlearned its ways to heal.

Two Addicts & a Cat

He & I “party” in his wrecked
apartment & in between highs
& lows I catch a glimpse
of his cat emerging from the laundry pile—
a moist & growing mass
slowly taking over the bedroom.
The cat sidesteps the broken
crack pipes &, with all the intelligence
of a sober animal, keeps its distance
from us & our all-night, all-day orgy
of sex, drugs & porn. I love a cat,
any cat, but don’t ask this one’s name,
whether it’s male or female,
the last time he or she was fed.

nub

• In middle school, samantha told me to use my nub finger to : “finger your own pussy.”
 she handed me a yellow-wrapped tampon, “for you,” from her purse. the only person
 i’ve ever met who’s missing similar finger bones is a gulf war
 veteran named alex from wayne, michigan; he lost half of his right
 index finger inside the bottom of a lawn mower he was trying to
 start. he told me it was “shredded past the point of no return.” three years
 ago, a physician i saw for an unrelated ailment informed me, while
 measuring my blood oxygen, that i can be dated by the skin grafting
 technique used to separate fingers’ web-
 bing. no radiocarbon needed. s h e offered m e
 a referral to have the grafts of pubic h a i r lasered
 off from between my fingers. i later learned L A S E R
 is an acronym: light amp- l i f - ication
 by sti- mul- a t - e d emission
 of radiation. t h - i s t e r - rified me.
 i accepted this doctor’s
 offer, but have y e t
 to contact the burn/
 skin unit at my hospital
 back i n michigan.
 challenge: close your
 eyes. t r y to imagine
 the voicemail
 you’d leave for the
 burn unit. like the
 rest of us, i am an
 artifact of modern
 medicine. a body which
 can be further
 improved upon. and
 further improved
 upon. and further
 improved upon .

Wilderness as History Lesson

Shine a light into the backseat, into shadows the car carries. If he's not inside, you know he's underneath: a quick slice knife, a quick prick needle. It's why you hear screams when you key into locks, feel a scraping of a different kind. Why girls believe in ghosts; after all, we are taught to make our own. The secret non-secret is that everything makes us pregnant—we carry strangers, we carry shadows, we carry phantom wind. We know the scary call is always coming from within. We don't leave drinks unattended, paint ourselves in roofie-detecting nail polish. You've heard it too many times: I was drunk & alone &—*witch, scholar, poet, dreamer, & the rest...* you have been these girls, *those who can sit down & weep, & still be counted as warriors*. There is a place for us, you say, *but we will have to change the laws of history, if we are not to give ourselves away*.

parking under streetlamps
 deep inside light makes you feel
 more vulnerable

*

[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] girls believe
[redacted] our own
[redacted] we carry [redacted] carry [redacted] carry
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
mitch [redacted] *dreamer* [redacted] *girl* [redacted]
[redacted] *warriors* [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

bone stars

I learn from my child's science homework
the cells of bones
look like stars bursting.

*Asymmetric fluid signal intensity enhancement along the left
sacroiliac joint issuspicious for sacroiliitis.*

In the bath,
eyes closed, hair a floating nebula,
I envision entire galaxies
in my hips,

*Mild increased sclerosis and cortical blurring along the
inferior
sacroiliac joints bilaterally.*

I imagine fireworks,
exploding stars.

*Edema and enhancement may represent a bone hemangioma with
reactive
inflammation in the marrow.*

Brighter than
Sun herself,
I am filled with supernovae
burning themselves into

extinction.

I Am My Own Avatar

Once, deep in the months of lockdown, I interviewed someone for an article I was writing. We had a long conversation over Zoom, disembodied heads talking to each other through space. It was pleasant enough, as these things go. He gave me the information I needed.

Afterward, it occurred to me that we'd probably never meet in real life—at that point, I wondered when I'd ever meet anyone in real life again—and how strange it seemed that someone who'd looked right at me for an hour would never find out I had a disability.

Many disabilities are invisible. Mine isn't one of those. I use a wheelchair. My leg bones are bowed and oddly proportioned. The word “deformity” appears on my medical chart. Every person with a disability experiences multiple layers of being disabled – there's your condition itself, and there's the world's response to you. The pandemic had relieved me of the latter. Working from home had rendered my differences invisible.

When lockdown began, I'd been at my job for only a few months and hadn't met everyone at the organization yet. Working remotely, I wasn't “out” as a wheelchair user to many of my colleagues. The subject hadn't come up (why would it?) and I hadn't mentioned it (why should I?). My face, whether as a static photo on my email profile or in motion on Zoom, stood in for my whole body, including my chair.

Countless think pieces appeared during those months, debating whether people could be as productive working from home as on site. If anything, my productivity rose, in part because I didn't have to deal with the kinds of interactions that often disrupt my day (nondisabled people hogging the one accessible restroom stall while the rest stand empty, or blocking my way through an entrance by holding open a door I easily could have opened myself). I hadn't realized how much mental and emotional energy those encounters required of me until I was removed from them. My days felt more streamlined, even as my outgoing personality bore the burden of physical isolation.

Eventually, as more and more people in my organization got fully vaccinated, our return to the office began to loom. Unlike the Zoom interview with the man I knew I'd never meet in person, suddenly every online interaction with my co-workers reminded me that soon they'd be in the same room with me – and my chair.

“Oh! I didn’t know you were in a wheelchair!”

Sure enough, after 17 months of emailing and being in Zoom meetings together, these were the first words one of my colleagues uttered upon seeing me offline. Not how nice it was to meet me face to face. Not how great or weird or terrible it felt to be back in the office. Not, oh, I don’t know, hello.

“And so it begins,” I thought.

No other introductions were that rude, but plenty were awkward. I greeted people by name and they looked blankly at me, at the same face they’d been seeing on Zoom for over a year, unable to notice anything but the chair now. I watched them do the mental gymnastics: “Why does this person in a wheelchair know who I am? I don’t know anybody in a wheelchair.” When they realized who I was, their faces changed, as if reconsidering everything they’d thought they knew about me. Were their opinions of me going higher or lower? I couldn’t tell.

I recalibrated some of my opinions as well. I appreciated the people who, thankfully, seemed unfazed. And I noticed the cases in which the versions of certain people who had interacted with me as a head on a screen and the versions of those same people who now knew about my wheelchair were very different.

While my colleagues and I settled into the new post lockdown routine, I did end up having one more interaction with the man I’d interviewed over Zoom. I’d asked him to send me a photo from the event I was writing about, and one day it appeared in my inbox, a group shot of him and the other event organizers.

Reader, he was in a wheelchair.

Did that realization make me think differently about him? For a moment, to be honest, I think I did. We had a long conversation over Zoom. It was pleasant enough, as these things go. He didn’t tell me (why should he?).

He gave me the information I needed.

Octopus

the octopus is pink because it is meant to
remind you of your womanhood
a slithering suction
of all

the darkness
and debris

every few months she cuddles
all the fish puckers
at their fat lips like
she is trying
to give air

what has she taught you otherwise?

that playing with your food is for
the entertainment of people

they applaud whenever
she severs
one of her limbs whenever you
sever one of your limbs

sad how the people want
to pet her
fleshy parts/tell her
 good girl
 as they tighten

the jar on her medicine

the quick flick of her arm is only
a child's punch

the opening requires

more

and when the twisting
makes her

bottom dweller blue
she doesn't give up
instead she swallows

the glass

the shame

all the expired fish too¹

¹ if you lose eight fingers/just to grow them back/it wouldn't be enough/because you are the same/pink octopus/in the same/goddamn ocean/with the same body/ that keeps brewing a disease

Migraine with Aura

Struck on the couch. I've got an ice pack. I'm holding it on the back of my neck. It's cold. The towel it is wrapped
My head hurts. The cold from the ice pack distracts a little. I guess. It's relaxing. My head is pounding.
his rough against my skin, but as the ice pack melts a bit it gets less wet. This ice pack isn't enough. Pounding.
Pounding. Pounding. It is hard to think. Pounding. Pounding. Blood rushing, pulsing. Mikhail is concerned.
What if I move? No! Things spin. A... Service is their love language. I love languages are kind of problematic,
Mikhail, can you get me the eye mask. They bring it to me. I put it on. The elastic twists and my
but understanding this has helped our communication. I tie the elastic of the eye mask twists my
hair bounces up. The mask is cold against my skin, but not... The ice pack. Feels heavy. Feels good. Say,
hair curls as if back combed into a bump. I imagine myself... my hair migrates and wanders
thank you. Mikhail says something. Good, but I don't really... pain is dis... Pounding. My arm is
laugh but it hurts to laugh. I am impatient with my body. ...e shoulder... neck cold cold cold. Try
free from holding the ice pack on my neck. Cold hand. The... is it rest... our mind is racing. If
none of it possible while I am in this condition. So I do what... ck. My body... hates. Pounding. The
to roll my neck from side to side. My... to roll my... this bad, really. Ice pick headaches are the
you are impatient with yourself. ...ng your...? This is... The pain doesn't stop
towel is pretty wet now so I... the nape of my neck is getting wet, too. The pain doesn't stop
when it feels as if someone is... ou. I don't know what an ice pick is. A hat thing you use to clean
is on, there's a breeze against... against the cold, making it colder. The fan makes a rushing sound
windshield. That doesn't so... all right girl. It sounds bad, though. Still, even with a nice pi...
I barely notice it with... everything is too much. I would blot my sweatshirt out if I could
headache I can get stuff done... a past the pain more often than not. I've always put out myself
Say, Mikhail, can you turn... Say, Mikhail, can you get my sweatshirt... near to
pain tolerance, on my capacity to... past or... more is entirely as this... Yes, so... the to...
out of their chair in the next room, a soft... sound from the feet of the chair and... the... feels
this resistance fills when I can't pretend in... to be in pain is bad enough, but... the...
near the seat. I know it's not loud but every sound seems amplified. The floor reverber... wakes here,
like weakness. Weakness feels like failure. Failure feels unacceptable. This is ableism. I want to
cushy to help. Each step reverberates in my head, as if they were knocking my brain... I pat the
holding my body with... and respect. I do a lot of reading. I have learned a lot... learned very
hoodle on... at a time. Even these small movements nauseate me. My body... does not
little. When... tells you there is no space for illness-- let alone chronic... to believe
cooperate... be like if I was allowed. If I allowed myself to listen to... these migraines
it. I want... could be like if I was allowed. If I allowed myself to listen to... these migraines
pain. The hoodie helps. I lay down on my stomach, let gravity... the ice pack so my
would... like they would be less. Or maybe I could just accept that they are a part of me, a part
arm can... blanches over my body. Pounding. I press the fat of my thumb against the eye mask,
of any... s. Irritable. Bodymind. I learned that term recently and I am still trying to
add mo... sure help. My skin is red, irritated by all of this. At least when it's irritated it gets kind
underst... I can. Dr. Chare talks about resisting the Western assumption that body and mind are
of warm... thing as a bath, but it will do. I will... mends for this later. I want to check my
separate... be independent and can be con... that way. I think about myself, my stress,
blended to... curls it's been dark. I don't want to... On my... my exhaustion, my isorash, my
pounding... depression, my weight, my trauma, my... my exhaustion, my isorash, my
pounding. My migraines. My migraines. This, here, now. It is connected. I am... ill. I am ill. My head hurts.

Frank Grimes [a love poem]

Cartoons are a grief
dirt layered
around their lips

Would you like to hear a joke
my father pink limbed
walks into a bar

In one corner a cartoon
character gets electrocuted
again and again

Cue the dead chorus
called laugh track
my father eats saltines

I don't question
sincerity or advice
about bad posture

Doctors in fine gray suits
say my father will
clutter to mangrove

His mouth empty of laughter
groans and ejaculates
over the giddy audience

In another corner another cartoon
character fondles a noose
says not today old friend

Nothing worth talking about
besides loss filled
with fluorescent light

Will you help me
scatter fish bones
around our house

Where Not to Go in a Pandemic

People crowd me everywhere
I go even though science
says social distance is a component
in my safety strategy.

I only visit
where I need
to stay alive.

I must look safe—
face shielded with microbial technology
embedded in multiple layers of cloth,
heavy duty laboratory glasses, long pants,
sleeves and gloves covering the rashes
exposed on my skin—

because in an elevator
empty of only my body
that man stands smack dab
right next to me.

unmade



Artist's Statement

"Fractured" is a word I often use to describe having a chronic illness. Some days there is light, some days not. Most days, it is a little of both. When I framed this photo (taken from a bed in a friend's house, clothes scattered around), I was struck by the way the light both cuts through the skeleton-like twigs in the vase (a body help upright) while also creating a fuller, bolder shadow of the twigs on the wall behind. Disability, for me, is always about the fractured interchange between light and dark. And "poet-me" would add the photo takes reference for its message from Emily Dickinson: "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant."

Let's Be Like the Internet

Etsy keeps trying to sell me “personalized
gifts” like handmade rings
fashioned from fake fingerprints,

& “sentimental keychains” with initials
—yours or mine—attached
to supposedly “real” seashells.

But what they don't write on the subject
line of their pale pink Mother's
Day emails: Your diagnosis.

Because that would be just too personal,
too unlike whatever dream
they are selling, reproducing as stale

inbox spam. Meanwhile you sleep
in that place with low light
wearing someone else's clothes

& fighting voices in your head
—not yours or mine. I still wait to learn
what label you get, if it's true this time

around. You feel fear: drowning
in a familiar ocean. Don't cry, please don't
be afraid; “ultra-personalized necklace”

waits in my shopping cart for the moment
you return. We'll unbox charms
that hang from a dainty gold chain, string

it across your neck, marvel at the lie.

Halfway/Passages

Cut my curls,
spike the remnants high.
Pull off my bra.
Let other hair grow.
Shove my hands into
baggy cargo pockets.

Cultivate a bad-ass saunter.
Delicious, dangerous dyke, curious,
open your cupboards wide.
To wash your shoulders,
rinse fragrant water down your laddered spine.
To bushel your moon-pale breasts
In my elbows' amorous crook.

Midnight,
Candlelight.
When you recline
among your pink pillows,
one hand behind your head.
Like a Reubens nude.

Floor creaks.
You smile, no doubt.
Door hinges squeak.
I come out.

Morse Code

The phone vibrates in my left hand. I am on a physical therapy table. In my other hand is a TENS machine that causes electrical pulses near the edges of my scapula. Both are slightly shocking. I read, *I'm in an emergency room in Texas. I started bleeding and they had to do surgery. When they opened me up, there were tumors. I'm worried about Norton and my parents. What are they going to do without me?* My first thought is that you're clearly not worried about what I'm going to do. My second thought is interrupted by the vomit rising in my throat. I sit up just in time to not choke on it. The TENS machine comes loose from its cord. I dropped the phone.

Later, I remember you don't live in Texas and you don't yet have an oncologist and pathology can take a couple of weeks and no general surgeon will diagnose any stage of cancer. Weeks later, I tell you what happened: The vomit. The Thera Band. The friend's birthday I had to skip so I will always know the date: *July 7th*. You say you don't remember sending that text at all. Which is typical. I could screenshot it and send it back to you but the moment's already passed. When we were close, we'd joke that I get the "catastrophically-charming" version of you; I get the red-alert. When we are not talking I imagine you suspended. Hiking somewhere in Colorado; in a high-altitude range I can't find my breath in. We only meet at sea level. When one of us is drowning.

After the oncologist removes everything she can: organs; soft tissue; the margins. After there is a PICC line, after we now have the same amount of poison and scar tissue, there's no need for *I'm sorry*. If it is true that the body regenerates all of its cells every 7 years, then this is easy: I just need you to defy statistics for another 2,562 days. Certainly, in the years that I have known you there have been at least 2,000 days when we haven't spoken. At least 1,700 days where my anger was synonymous with your name. Or vice versa. I used to end every conversation with *I'll switch with you, I'll take your place. Just say when. When.*

Echo with Pandemic

You are bare-breasted and mask-mouthed, watching the lines rise on the monitor, then fall in scalene planes. Measuring from point to point, the technician pauses, hand with the wand on

your left breast, propping it up as the muscle pulses on screen, dense tissue gone gossamer. A winter catfish out of its

mud-slumber, your heart is sluggish one second, racing to come bask in a sunspot the next. As he probes, you breathe back in your coffee-scented air, count the times the fish tries

to flip, evading the hook. After, the cardiologist inventories your life, says that he too lost his brother young to a widow-maker

without warning. But your tachycardia is idiopathic, if anyone is asking. The fish wants out of the lake of your throat, wants to know why it's swimming, gills exposed, awake in the wrong season.

Bipolar Not Otherwise Specified

I keep the mania in check
but truth is, I miss it.
That's what they don't include in the DSM:
symptoms become friends
even when they're telling you
to drive off jagged cliffs.

I still remember the new sounds in music,
instruments I'd never caught before.
Life was crispy, but too sharp
and I was the only one there.

The euphoria always faded
becoming agitation and visions of bloodied concrete,
too fast in expansion, too slow to contract.

I try to remember if it was always like this.

Yes
and
No.

A little off, though I always had
my magical moments.

I just wanted to belong to the sea
but the land claimed me first.

The Artist is Tired

Marina Abramovic falls asleep during restaging of 'The Artist is Present'

—Jasmine Liu, hyperallergic.com

She believes time is a flat circle,
that she will come back around someday
to the red lips and all night of youth,
but this arc seems to bend long
with no curve in sight. She crosses
just before the light changes, has to push
through crowds fawning on the other side.
Is this art they whisper like the shush of traffic.
In her wake Christie's puts up sawhorses
to protect where she stepped. In the supermarket
she fingers the taut skin of a tomato, samples
one green grape. The face of the produce boy
is unlined as new-stretched canvas.
Watchers are in the wine aisle, peeking
from behind the pinot. Is this art,
they ask the champagne. Sotheby's
has already sold the tomato for millions,
the memory of the grape for more.
At her doorstep she scrapes her shoes
on the mat. Eyes bloom in the bushes
to each side. She sits on the stoop
to remove her shoes, and one
brave girl breaks away from the pack.
The girl moves like a masterpiece.
Unyellowed by light from museum windows,

her arc is yet unbent. Is this art, she asks,
gesturing to the shoe, to the mat,
to the dirt on the mat. Are you art?

midbrain

Here, between sensation and action, between sleep and wakefulness,
a roof, a waterway, some hills, two feet in black sandals,
the desire to know, and enough reason for joy—

In the deep center, the body knows when to blink
and when not to feel pain. Here, the right hand knows
what the left hand does. Memories of muscles

and what to do with sound—

The nearby reservoir is mothered by tenderness
and a spider. There, a drop of blood like a thunderclap—

Here, climate. Here, the body's stem, the stone, the pit—

Best Seats in the House

There are no whole stories for a child who lip-reads. But there are fragments. -Ilya Kaminsky

The half-deaf lip-reading child must choose:
the face of the teacher or a friend.
I chose my teachers, imagined them as friends.

We half-deaf see one word in three. Others,
we guess from context. Fragments of stories
require mental leaps, faith, like poetry.

Let me explain the difficulties: a speaker turned
to face the board, bad lighting, facial hair over lips,
a face obscured by hands, non-native speakers,

and, worst of all, the person who speaks
without moving their mouth. Let me remind you:
I can't hear after you turn out the lights.

In South Korea, eye contact is bold,
avoided with superiors or between
any two people being polite.

Korean male professor and half-deaf
female student trying to read his speech,
we spent years dodging each other.

Best seats: almost always at the front.

One semester, the professor sat at the head
of a very long table in an old house.

With *across* being too far, I sat beside her
watching spinach stuck to her teeth
flop up and down for sixty minutes.

Autobiography | Self Story True

My ears hear only too little. I am wheeled into the hospital.	Both-ears-hear-hear little-flick Me-swept-in hospital
The deadened stars of glossy paint fade as I fall woozily into a faint.	Paint shiny look-like stars fade My-head woozy f-a-i-n-t
Cobwebs have lined my golden veins. I haven't got time for the pain.	Me former golden boy now inside old Pain different-different-different bored finish
Faces of my family lost after so long: what, oh what had I done truly so wrong?	Awaken-see family there face theirs-theirs-theirs different Me do-do wrong-wrong what
They cluster around me, a stranger. The waiting room holds less danger.	Family stand-around me stranger all-along Waiting room there people danger none
My insurance can't cover all their hopes. I've cashed in all my policies to cope.	Family expectations my life meet not Me struggle all-along survive
I've steered madly from expectations. Now there's not much conversation.	Family expectations me fail finish Now what mouths-talk superficial
As the doctors open my head to heal, I float away. Life's a test to feel.	Doctor thumb-knife-above-ear fix-fix Me ghost-float-away life what? Pain suffer-suffer

Erasure of the Affirmation

When my acrylics click-clack-pap I feel like a bad bitch but everyone calls me ma'am. I went to see a rheumatologist (a bad bitch got inflamed joints) the male nurse kept calling me miss. I miss the days when whiteness hadn't yet kissed us. Kiss is generous. I miss the days before the assault by those who get off on salting the wounds of their most despised possessions. We were who we were and that was perfect-whole-complete. I remember life outside of this body it comes in my dreams. It dances between the chest voices of Chaka and Whitney. I am nobody but the backs of those who came before me. Lasserated and flowering like honeysuckle trees I am every woman neither man nor woman I devour all in between. I am everything the universe has to offer on a silver platter sneaking bites in between. Taking bites of flesh the fingers of honorable guests trace boxes around me.

			everyone calls me
	bad bitch	inflamed joints	kept calling me
			generous. I miss the days before the assault
			We were
perfect-whole-complete.	I remember life		body
voices	and	nobody	dreams. dances between
Lasserated and flowering	honey	backs	woman neither man nor woman I devour
	suckle		on a silver platter
	the universe		me.
flesh the fingers	honor		

everyone calls
kept calling
generous

assault

perfect- complete. remember

body
and nobody
woman

neithernor

womandevour
silver platter flesh
the me.

assault complete. body woman woman devour me.

Erasure of the Affirmation” is written in a 4-part form created by the poet called Soliloquy Erasure. The form works to distill complex reactions, emotions, ideas, etc. into one ultimate reflection.

Start part 1 of the Soliloquy Erasure with a passage of prose that functions as a soliloquy—a series of unspoken reflections. Write this prose as if you’re speaking to no one but yourself. For part 2, create an erasure of part 1; part 3, an erasure of part 2 and so on. Maintain the original word order and line position throughout until part 4. Part 4 should be one line, still maintaining original word order.

Questions for My Medication

For 17 years, you have been
put into pill boxes like students
into assigned seats and I wonder:
Are you friends? Do you ever compare
side effects like answers to homework?
Did you ever bully the one that wasn't white,
or wish you were a different color?
Perhaps the forest green of my multivitamin?
Do you miss the colored ones that were
expelled due to disorderly conduct
in my body? Do you miss interacting
with them in the playground
of my digestive system? Do you sing
their names still, try to hold onto
memories even as you dissolve?

Your Body Wakes

you tells you
you have an urge you
can't deny.

it is hungry or hunger force
fed by **descontrol** need
to eat-shit-fuck
 [it don't care]
 so what-where-who
will judge & some punk **jura** will
split you in difference.

By and by
 ... momento, por favor ...
you pry open your crossed eyes
squeeze your **nalgas** & jump
up & at 'em
 [whoever they think
 they are].

Your right leg is wrong
your head is running behind
you throw your best arms
out

make them
pick a fight

settle into it
fitly screaming

“¡hoy no habrá jodida!”

Things are Looking Up, Baby!

In the future, you will be with me, and I will be with you. This means we exchange molecules through our mouths. This means the creeping things are outside the box that has us in it. This means we create a new smell. This means you will feel what it's like under my skin. At some point it will be night and at some point it will be raining. In the future, I will comment on the rain as though I had never experienced rain in December before. In the future, I am flying over a vast blueness. I am inside a machine. A machine for flying; a machine for killing; a machine for dying. In the future, we're both dead.

In the future, we're both dead and alive. This is not only possible, it is true. We are dead and we are walking beside the river full of boats and birds and scum, the blackberry thicket, the island made of junk and garbage, its amputated hubcaps glistening in the sun. We are alive and we are rusting under the weight of small hard moments piling up on us like frenzied ants. Ants carry pieces of our hearts away. In the future, someone will find our fossilized footprints and they won't know anything about our hearts.

In the future, the world does what aluminum foil does in a microwave oven. The world is a tweaker jumping off the top of a parking garage. The world is an electrified bathtub. I have seen the future and it is bright like the asbestos fire beneath Centralia, Pennsylvania. I have seen the future, and we're roasting futile marshmallows in its orange ribbons.

In the future, we are doing this together.

In the future, there is no difference between us. This means we are holding hands. This means we harbor the same spores in our secret places. This means we bloom at the same time, from the same scorched earth. This means that when they see our silhouettes, they won't be able to tell where I end and you begin. Or where you end and the rest of humanity begins beyond you, stretching forward and back in a paper chain of stiff shadows, linked by phalanges. A line of human beings like a line of ants, each bearing a sliver of meat, each carrying time in their jaws.

In the future, everything belongs to the ants. They fill up your kitchen. It's raining in December. It's Friday; I'm in love. There are eggs in the sink and they hatch into smoke from the never-ending flames that scorch the asphalt of an abandoned town. The future is here. It's eating us alive.

Us, alive.

Beggar Breakfast



Artist's Statement

When I was young, long ago, we were taught that the artist should concentrate on one medium—oil, sculpture, pastel, etc.—and certainly not presume to communicate in more than one voice. I remember being fascinated by Van Gogh's letters, Blake's prints with his poetry, Haiga, the Japanese form containing poems and drawings. But, listening to my masters, I accounted these flukes beyond the normal range of living mortals, certainly of a female. So when, but by bit, I became aware of the multiplicity of expression by artists of all genders, I broke from my cultural limits.

I use various voices alone or layered. Poems can stand alone, be published without visuals, or be included in visual art as illumination, as gloss, as decoration. And etchings are sometimes printed on collages of paper, fabric; scraps saved from my personal history, freighted with memories and associations that I hope enhances the intensity.

What it Means to Say Mania

Isn't it easy to delight in
the slack feeling of it in the mouth? It spurts.
So easy— energy in hands
poured out with such a word.

Look at her.

Manic isn't magic, isn't muse.
It appears as plastic decorations in a doctor's office,
cramped cellophane pine,
crumpled from a year of storage in
the closet behind the check-in desk,
a flickering plastic menorah
out in out again.

As flashing lights of plastic faces
on streetscreens, billboards, magazines,
As fuel for the body to wake
to catch each ray of sunrise, yes, but also
to burn the edges
of sleep so that it flakes into paperdust.

As stale alcohol left in the bottoms
of beer bottles. There is always the morning
after and always so much to clean.

This energy isn't energy. It is an electric
contraction of the marrow of trees
which is sap

which is sucked
which is full of sweet insects which is, which is

The Many Ways to Drown

This 1st responder will carry you forever
the air bubbles gasping from Dog Days River muck
will make him vomit for years to come. He will never again
split the breast of a Christmas or Thanksgiving turkey
without feeling your green 8 year old ribs crack
from adrenaline fired chest compressions. He will never
allow his own children near the river or lake or pool
again and they will rebel—scream adolescent hate at him
hurl dejection glaringly, stand lily-white
on the outer side of the chain link fence, their friends,
friends' parents and school mates flutter-kick
and bob between lifeguard whistles, their arms floundering.
He will not be able to save his own children
from misconception, fallacies, fake news, propaganda or
risk-driven misunderstandings communicated
by his own grief and what ifs—what if
they had searched there first? What if
someone had noticed the boy's absence sooner? What if
tell me, what if,
the loss of all children was mourned equally?
What if this river's death did not pull him back into the humidity
that gags him still as still
as lifeless children
in a man's arms—a father's arms? How
do we protect from this?
Keep safe.
Keep clean.

How can a man wash clean from this kind of self-inflicted failure when his arms still carry the weighted truth?
He did everything he could and still
it was not enough.

the dream (the bed)

after Frida Kahlo, 1940

we know
these maladies, viruses, twisted bone & flesh tornado
courted by the body, so many lovers we lost track

corpuscles pinned like corsage, reddest tender bloom
warding off misery in misery's ward—
minute body in the endless count of the minute
pounding out a bilious blues,

how a red blood cell is also a historical tiny particle
founding matter or light
how we fight how we matter
how we bear

ecological catastrophe of relations, immunity & flood,
broken shards, the cell
 is a room with a nucleus,
 a cave for fugitive planning

we steal an hour by thriving: that is what we call organizing
& they will call the thriving work-shy, shiftless idles we
unmoving wrapped in night-sweat pillows, fuckery
of nine to five & dime shifts, let shiftless mean we beat the clock,
settler colonial time, its genocides pumping through our veins
who wouldn't run & bury, scheme & steal an hour?

the heart, a peeled citrus weeping ichor
for the days when I must be my own mother
& bed is a grave one day we will refuse to leave
& bed is a womb we rise from daily, a grave we refuse

we know
that affliction is diasporic too
the weight of wars inflicted
the nervous system latticed by the wound

Death, she knows no borders—so
when she knocks, we will put the needle to the vinyl,
offer tequila while downing its tendrils, say *dance with me*.

when we were swain fighting fascism, did loving anguish
as much as the chronicling of every curative violence
from which we wretched were raked ungovernable? (even Death is perplexed)

did you dream my strange face up, like Frida in the face of her strange?
did you know that I was here all along, bizarre and flawed
searching for you from the tiny island of canopy hay,
flower bed, river bed, freshly tilled with my fevers,
this recline & fertile ground?

Vertigo

For my PhD, I take notes where people fall apart.
Their bodies break, or their minds, or something else.
A thousand different shatterings: borderline personality,
HIV, a dead mother, addiction, blindness, Crohn's,
some unnamed immune system disaster, anything
you can think of, we're dying or dead from it.
I've had my share too, some from that list, some
my own special cocktail of despair. I can add vertigo now.
I can't recall when it started or when I noticed
how bad it's gotten, but now I can hardly look out the window
from my office on the third floor. Yes, my stomach drops,
my heart stutters, just like the clichés, but it also feels
like my whole skeleton pops out of my back. I shudder back
like nails-on-a-chalkboard or ripping cotton balls or
crushing dry cornstarch. All those skin-crawl miseries.
My second year here in Nebraska, one of our alumni
jumped off her department building's roof in Texas.
I never met her, but I knew her boyfriend, watched
every professor's face here crack apart, fuse back together,
stained-glass visages all around, stained-glass windows
I can hardly look through. Now the sun has gone down
under its winter blanket, and out of the window is a darkness
that doesn't stir my guts like curdled milk. But I do think of falling.
I dream of it many nights. They're called hypnagogic jerks,
the sudden freaks of the legs and arms when you crash-land
in your sleep. I wonder if that woman had my dreams too.
I wonder if she had vertigo. I wonder how bad it'll get.

In my apartment on the fourth floor, I keep my window blinds closed. I lie down on my bed and watch myself die again.

when i dissociate, all cis-men sound like batman

—that combination of raspy one-liners + saying *something urgent*
 has come up + dark suits cufflinks around wrists flailing
like wisps of fog + *swear to me!* & i take off my shirt—not long
 ago how many men would've locked me in a hospital the first time
i didn't know where i was?

my chest a wormhole knives fall into
hot air hissing skin off ribs

my head a foot in a door
 stuck between what happened
& what men tell me happened

while they hold me—

—i swear when i feel the words coming
 out of someone's chest, kiss

the vibrations in their throat i can
only believe them

(sometimes) i spot an hour
maybe two—falling past my eyes
(sometimes) i ask men for the time
& they pretend they don't hear me
(sometimes) i don't even write
a grocery list to remind myself
i can survive being lost

surface bloom

don't be fooled by surface bloom they are fissures filigreed
for displeasure

fungus gnats give company the peace lily dried unbloomed
what does it mean to feed on the living

when you are supposed to gorge on the dead

dida's eyes water without permission ma cries on purpose
mine refuse to leak fatigued fractures surface blossoms

I smack my eyes with freezing water
revel for a moment
in tender
slaps

The Unchosen

Multiple Choice (Choose one.)

- Health Insurance
- Prescription Meds
- Food
- Rent

Artist's Statement

"The Unchosen" is part of a series of over 80 drawings made during the pandemic entitled, *What I Have Learned*. The 36" x 24" lined paper was sourced for free from Craigslist during the shutdown at the beginning of the pandemic. The paper is the sort used to teach penmanship in school and belonged to an elementary school teacher. I use charcoal in my drawings since, in its activated form, it is used to absorb chemicals in the body. When I made this drawing, I was thinking of the choices that had to be made before the pandemic that were exacerbated even more with the loss of jobs. Sometimes, it's not only about the choices we are forced to make because of circumstances or limited access to resources, but the impact of what is not chosen and left behind. I wanted to question the privilege of having a choice or even better choices when, for others, the choice is made for you. That freedom is taken away. You are left with the irony of the loss when there really is no choice left.

Étude III: Halfway Through The Script



She tells you she thought you hated her when you first met her; this you've heard and heard before. Tongue tied + resting bitch face, the combination's gotten you in trouble early on, no matter how sexism-loaded the latter label, how trauma-rooted the former - no, You are good with words. It's just: shy is introverted is depressed is sometimes one or some or all. When you were little, they tied you by your dress waistribbon to a swing pole and left you there. The bell rang. Class went on, you went on unnoticed, mouthing like a fish. Your voice, esprit d'escalier. Your daddy's daddy, he was a quiet one too. Ice-like, they called him, they call you too. You plan ahead so nerves never sucker-punch, but every time: the moment has passed. Yes: You aren't so good with words. Broken wolof, 'you have an accent' when you switch, lifelong litany. Confounding, paradoxical: too quiet for Angry Black Woman, too angry-looking to elude implications. Really, really, it's just your face. Ah, talking is full ruins. Prosy words rarely hold a candle to the incandescence inside you. Without, within: immiscible. That's okay. What is there to modulate when you sing like a punctured drum?

Artist's Statement

I have been drawn to water for as long as I've been alive, perhaps even longer. I want art that functions as an extension of its fluidity. The mediums take backstage to the message; I channel said message through the avenues that will articulate it the clearest, be they visual, musical or textual, or, in this case, a hybrid. Always, like in this piece, identity takes center stage: what does it mean to simultaneously be from plural spaces but be one individual? To contain multitudes but never truly know the singular self? Mellifluous, rhythmic and hypnotic: I want my art to unsettle. I want my art to remain in those in-between spaces between answers and doubts. I want my art to be ever-moving, to live in a temporary house, just like the tide comes and goes and comes.

The Green Woman

A nude of an old woman—
bunched like a gargoyle
flat breasted, pot bellied, wrinkled,
elongated prunes for fingers
with pips for nails—
rendered in heavy, olive strokes
and muddy shadows,
aubergine but almost brown.

Something of her followed me
when I left the gallery—
although I could only speak
about her ugly features, unable
to capture the part that captured me.

For nights, I failed to understand
I aspired to be her—
 not to her ugliness,
 no one needs more of that—
but to her hidden power.

Unbothered by grotesque limbs,
unsavory complexion, unkind
rendering of age the painter
chose to represent her,
she wrought a beauty on her own

from inner truths, casting
splendor all around her,
suggesting vision has more
force

than

sight.

these days, i hold pep talks with my body, where i paraphrase / all my disabilities

this poem begins by opening its cleft palate, leaking
out a confession from the crook of my mouth. i hereby
s-s-st-stam-stammer this slobber into an admittance that my body
is a dictionary of disabilities. in it, i try to look up the antonyms of im- pairments
tenanting this temple without tithes.

on days my photochromic lens limps to its mobile hideout, the sun moons into a
dimness that blinds my brains into a rainbow of splitting headaches. as if to say the insensitive
lens is mocking my right leg's occasional semi- lameness. last evenfall, i walked out on
maghrib at its median: the limb stiffened into a rebel my body couldn't contain. what is it with
limbs that makes them chronic traitors, unwrapping their hosts into a
laughingstock

i was born with lollipop?
aberration appendaged

to both of my little fingers.

in some places, the postaxial polydactyl is a hexed mutant. in a college class
my fr- enemies exhibited my extra extremities in a trade fair of derision, calling
me abàmì èdá — the strange one. our yorùbá teacher compiled my trauma
into a lecture prologued with: a ò kín ti ojù oníka mífà kà á — it's a taboo
to count a six-fingered's fingers in their presence. after, she swore on şàngó
that the nubbins on my pinkies vestige my divinity
that where we're from, i'm an òrìşà
that olúgbódi is my orúkọ àmútòrunwá — name brought from heaven. since then,
every fajr, i worship my body in a cathedral of encomiums.

i used to compose my insecurities into a threnody for the dying
things i entomb in the wounds that litter the in & out of my body

but these days, i hold pep talks with my body, where i paraphrase
all my disabilities into their politically correct synonyms. by that

speech act, i'm rechristening myself as àkàndá — the specially
created: the one birthed to refract into a fluorescence of wonders.

About the Authors

Colleen Abel is the author of the poetry collection *Remake* (Unicorn Press, 2017) as well as two chapbooks, including *Deviants*, a hybrid work that won Sundress Publications' 2016 Chapbook Prize. The recipient of fellowships from the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, Tulsa Artist Fellowship, Ragdale, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and other organizations, she has appeared in venues such as *Lit Hub*, *The Southern Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Pleiades*, and elsewhere. She is assistant professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, where she helms *Bluestem Magazine*.

Owólabi Aboyade is a father, poet, MC, essayist, and portal hopper. He is a co-editor of *Bullet*Train*, a print and digital magazine chronicling Detroit's revolutionary cultures. His speculative poetry has received recognition by the Science Fiction Poetry Association and the Odd Contest and was published in Sundress Publications' *NOMBONO* anthology edited by Akua Lezli Hope. He serves as Writer in Residence at *Geez Magazine* and is a co-founder of Relentless Bodies, a Detroit-based creative disability and healing justice collective. His work has been published in *Hood Communist*, *Riverwise Magazine*, and *Drum Voices Revue* among others. Owólabi is a 2021 Radical Imagination Fund fellow for advancing Detroit's justice culture. Under his stage name "Will See," he has released four hip hop records: *The Basics*, *Sol SWGGR*, *Detroit Diplomat*, and *Mutation Mixtape*.

Parisa Akhbari is a queer, disabled Iranian American therapist and writer from Seattle, Washington. Her poetry has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize and The Best of the Net. Parisa's debut young adult novel, *Just Another Epic Love Poem*, is forthcoming from Penguin/Dial in Spring 2024. Through poetry and prose, the novel tells the story of two best friends who have been writing a never-ending poem together for five years and explores how the poem—and their friendship—changes when the girls fall in love with one another. Subscribe to Parisa's newsletter for book updates and fun arts and culture finds at www.parisawrites.com.

Latif Askia Ba is a poet with choreic cerebral palsy from Brooklyn and Staten Island, New York. He's currently an MFA candidate at Columbia University and an author at Stillhouse Press, who's publishing his first full collection, *The Machine Code of a Bleeding Moon*. Ba was the First Place Winner of the Perceptions

Writing and Art Contest, judged by Sheila Black in 2021, and the Second Place Winner of the Iris N. Spencer Award in 2020. His debut collection, *Wet Monasteries*, was published by Alien Buddha Press in 2019.

Joanna Barnett (she/her) is a slam poet who lives in Austin, TX. She is the author of two poetry collections: *Snake Pit* (310 Brown Street, 2019) and *DNA Like Jam* (310 Brown Street, forthcoming). She graduated from Barnard College in 2014 with a degree in South Asian studies and promptly abandoned that field. She is very skilled at both bar trivia and board games and so is constantly prepared for an impromptu game of Trivial Pursuit. No one has challenged her to one yet, but hope is eternal.

Susan Barry-Schulz grew up just outside of Buffalo, New York. She is a poet living with chronic illness and an advocate for mental health and reducing stigma in IBD. Her poetry has appeared in *New Verse News*, *SWWIM*, *Barrelhouse online*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *Shooter Literary Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Wild Word*, *Bending Genres*, *Feral*, *Quartet*, *Wordgathering*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *West Trestle Review*, and elsewhere.

Megan Bent is a lens-based artist interested in the malleability of photography and the ways image-making can happen beyond using a traditional camera. This interest started to occur after the diagnosis of a progressive chronic illness. Drawn to image-making processes that reject perfection, accuracy, or any certainty in results, she is interested instead in processes that reflect and embrace her disabled experience, especially interdependence, impermanence, care, and slowness.

Laura Adrienne Brady is a writer, educator, and singer-songwriter (known as Wren). Her poems and essays have appeared in *Brevity*, *The Rappahannock Review*, *Reckoning Press*, *EcoTheo Review*, Seattle city buses, and elsewhere. Laura's most recent project, *Pink Stone: Songs from Moose Lodge*, is a folk album of original songs and an illustrated companion book of essays. Set in Washington's Methow Valley, the collection explores themes of illness, intimacy, and healing. Laura holds an MFA in creative writing from Northern Arizona University and is the recipient of a 4Culture Art Projects grant. Explore her music and writing at www.lauraadriennebrady.com.

Cori Bratby-Rudd is a queer LA-based writer and co-founder of Influx Collectiv(e)'s Queer Poetry Reading Series. She is the author of the chapbook *Cage of Eden* (Finishing Line Press, 2020).

Sarah Browning is the author of the poetry collections *Killing Summer* (Sibling Rivalry Press) and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden* (The Word Works). She is co-founder and for 10 years was Executive Director of Split This Rock: Poems of Provocation & Witness. She currently teaches workshops for Writers in Progress and works as a coach and consultant for other creative writers. Browning is an Associate Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and recipient of the Lillian E. Smith Writer-in-Service Award, as well as fellowships from the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, Yaddo, Mesa Refuge, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and others. She has been guest editor or co-edited special issues of *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Origins*, *The Delaware Poetry Review*, and *Poetry*. She received an MFA in poetry and creative non-fiction at Rutgers University Camden and lives in Philadelphia. For more info: www.sarahbrowning.net.

Mugabi Byenkya is an award-winning writer of poetry, prose, essays, drama, comics, and songs. His essays, poetry, and comics have been published in *carte blanche*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, and *Skin Deep*, along with over 40 other publications. He has been interviewed on Voice of America, NTV Uganda, and Urban TV, along with over 80 other media outlets. Mugabi's writing is used to teach high school English in Kampala and Toronto schools. He won the Discovering Diversity Poetry Contest in 2017. In the same year, his award-nominated debut, *Dear Philomena*, was published and he went on a 43 city, 5 country North America/East Africa tour. In 2018, Mugabi was named one of 56 writers who has contributed to his native Uganda's literary heritage in the 56 years since independence by Writivism. *Dear Philomena*, was named a Ugandan bestseller in the same year. Mugabi wants to be Jaden Smith when he grows up.

Jody Chan is a writer, drummer, organizer, and therapist based in Toronto/Tkaronto. They are the author of *haunt* (Damaged Goods Press), *all our futures* (PANK), and *sick* (Black Lawrence Press), winner of the 2018 St. Lawrence Book Award and 2021 Trillium Award for Poetry. They are also a performing member with Raging Asian Womxn Taiko Drummers. They can be found online at www.jodychan.com.

Lane Chasek's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Hobart*, *Narrative Northeast*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *perhappened*, *South Dakota Review*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and various other journals. Lane's first novel, *She Calls Me Cinnamon*, is forthcoming from Pski's Porch.

Marlena Chertock has two books of poetry: *Crumb-sized: Poems* (Unnamed Press) and *On that one-way trip to Mars* (Bottlecap Press). She uses her skeletal dysplasia as a bridge to scientific poetry. She is queer, disabled, and serves on the board of Split This Rock, a nonprofit that cultivates poetry that bears witness to injustice

and provokes social change. Previously, she served as the co-chair of OutWrite, Washington, D.C.'s annual LGBTQ literary festival. Her poetry and prose have appeared in AWP's *The Writer's Notebook*, *Breath & Shadow*, *The Deaf Poets Society*, *Lambda Literary Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Paper Darts*, *Washington Independent Review of Books*, *WMN Zine*, *Wordgathering*, and more. Find her at marlenachertock.com and on socials at @mchertock.

Emily Rose Cole is the author of *Thunderhead*, a collection from University of Wisconsin Press, and *Love & a Loaded Gun*, a chapbook of persona poems in women's voices from Minerva Rising Press. She holds an MFA in poetry from Southern Illinois University and a PhD in poetry with an emphasis in Disability Studies from the University of Cincinnati.

Gemma Cooper-Novack is the author of *We Might As Well Be Underwater* (Unsolicited Press, 2017). Her poetry and fiction have appeared in more than forty journals, including *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Midway Journal*, and Lambda's Poetry Spotlight, and she has been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes and Best of the Net Awards. Published chapbooks include *Too Much Like a Landscape* (Warren Tales, 2015) and *Bedside Manner* (The Head and the Hand, 2020). Gemma's plays have been produced in Chicago, Boston, and New York. She was a runner-up for the 2016 James Jones First Novel Fellowship, and has been awarded artist's residencies from Catalonia to Virginia and a grant from the Barbara Deming Fund.

Steven Cordova's full-length collection of poetry, *Long Distance*, was published by Bilingual Review Press in 2010. His poems have appeared in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Hunger Mountain Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Los Angeles Review* and *Pleades*. From San Antonio, TX, he lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Tarik Dobbs (b.1997; Dearborn, MI) is a writer + artist. Tarik is a 2022 finalist for the Poetry Foundation's Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship. Tarik's poems appear in the *Best New Poets* and *Best of the Net* anthologies, as well as *Guernica Magazine* and *Poetry*. Tarik helps run poetry.onl and served as a guest editor at *Mizna: Prose, Poetry, and Art Exploring Arab America*, as well as *Zoeglossia*. In 2022, Tarik received an MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota, and is presently an MFA fellow in art, theory, practice, at Northwestern University. Tarik's debut poetry collections, *Nazar Boy* (2024) and *Dearbornistan* (2026) are forthcoming from Haymarket Books.

Kara Dorris is the author of two poetry collections: *Have Ruin, Will Travel* (2019) and *When the Body is a Guardrail* (2020) from Finishing Line Press. She has also published five chapbooks including *Carnival Bound [or, please unwrap me]* co-written with Gwendolyn Paradise (The Cupboard Pamphlet, 2020). Her poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *DIAGRAM*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *RHINO*, *Tinderbox*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Wordgathering*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Crazyhorse*, among others literary journals, as well as the anthology *Beauty is a Verb* (2011). Her prose has appeared in *Waxwing* and the anthology *The Right Way to be Crippled and Naked* (2016). She is an assistant professor of English at Illinois College. For more information, please visit www.karadorris.com.

Angie Ebba is a queer disabled writer, educator, and performer who has taught writing workshops and performed both online and across the United States. She's a published essayist with a focus on writing about disability and chronic illness, relationships and sexuality, and body positivity. She has poetry published in *Closet Cases*, *Queering Sexual Violence*, and several literary magazines, as well as essays in *Healthline*, *Creaky Joints*, *O.School*, and more. She believes strongly in the power of words to help us gain a better understanding of ourselves, to build connections and community, and to make personal and social change. Ebba can be found online at www.rebelonpage.com

Stacy J. Estep's work has appeared in *Breaking Ground*, *Atticus Review*, *bluemilk*, and *California Quarterly*, among others. When she's not writing or reading, she enjoys knitting, sewing, and taking her wheelchair out on any paved trail she can find. She lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, with her husband and three cats.

Ahja Fox is a Colorado native who has editorial, hosting, and teaching experience through Art of Storytelling, Poetix University, *Copper Nickel*, and *Homology Lit*. She has been published in various online and print journals like *Five:2:One*, *LEVELER*, *Driftwood Press*, *Okay Donkey*, *SWWIM*, and more (including various anthologies). Nominated by several journals for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, Ahja has finally gotten up the nerve to draft two poetry manuscripts. One was a CAAPP Book Prize Finalist in 2021. She is also the poet laureate of her city and plans on doing big community work related to poetry.

Catherine Garbinsky is a writer living in Knoxville, Tennessee. They received their MFA in poetry from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, where they are now pursuing their doctorate. Catherine has written two chapbooks: *All Spells Are Strong Here* (Ghost City Press, 2018) and *Even Curses End* (Animal Heart Press, 2019), and her work has been featured in *Yes Poetry*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, and elsewhere.

David Greenspan is the author of *One Person Holds So Much Silence* (Driftwood Press) and the chapbook *Nervous System with Dramamine* (The Offending Adam). He's a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi and earned an MFA from UMass Amherst. His poems have appeared, or will soon, in places like *Denver Quarterly*, *Fence*, *Narrative*, *New Mexico Review*, *Salamander Magazine*, and others. Find him online at www.davidgreenspanwriter.com.

Karen Head is the author of five books of poetry, including *Lost on Purpose*, *My Paris Year*, and *Sassing*. She is the Poet Laureate of Fulton County (Georgia), the Poet Laureate of Waffle House, the editor of *Atlanta Review*, and a professor at Missouri S&T. She writes ekphrastic poems; she also takes photographs in hopes others might be inspired. Her body is frequently disagreeable—and has been for most of her life. She knows this: “When someone asks how you are doing, they don’t really want the truth.” So, she often tries to answer that question in her art.

Phyllis Hemann grew up reading and telling stories. As a child, she scribbled poems with crayons. Now she writes her own for children and adults. She studied creative writing and theology, and holds a MFA from Antioch University Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in newspapers, journals, and anthologies. She is the author of *The Invisible Heroine* (Finishing Line Press). Every day she battles a rare illness called Stills Disease (aka Systemic Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis). When not writing, she dabbles in photography, illustration, jewelry, and dog training. She lives in Arkansas with her family and their goofy dog. Find her online at www.phyllishemann.com and on socials at @phyllishemann.

Emily Hoover is the author of the forthcoming poetry chapbook, *My Mother as a Serrano Pepper* (Zeitgeist Press, 2023). Her poetry, fiction, and reviews have been published by *The Disappointed Housewife*, *The Citron Review*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, *Rinky Dink Press*, *BULL*, *Necessary Fiction*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Ploughshares blog*, *The Rupture*, and others. Her creative works have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, *Best Small Fictions Anthology*, and *Best Microfiction Anthology* as well as selected as honorable mention for *Madville's* 2019 *Runaway Stories Anthology* and *Clever Magazine's* 2022 flash contest. She lives in Las Vegas. Find her on Instagram and twitter as @emilywho.

Rachael Ikins is a 2016/18 Pushcart, 2013/18 CNY Book Award, 2018 Independent Book Award winner, a 2019 Vinnie Ream & Faulkner poetry finalist, and a 2021 Best of the Net nominee. She is a Syracuse

University graduate and author/illustrator of nine books in multiple genres. Her writing and artwork have appeared in journals worldwide from India, UK, Japan, Canada, and US. Born in the Fingerlakes, she lives by a river with her dogs, cats, saltwater fish, a garden that feeds her through winter, and riotous houseplants with a room of their own. Frogs find their way to her fountain. Dragons fly by.

Natalie E. Illum is a poet, disability activist, and singer living in Washington, D.C. She is a four-time recipient of the D.C. Commission's Arts & Humanities fellowship and a 2019 Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best New Poet nominee. She was a founding board member of mothertongue, a LGBTQA open mic that lasted 15 years. She competed in the National Poetry Slam circuit and was the 2013 Beltway Grand Slam Champion. She has an MFA from American University. You can find her on Instagram and Twitter as @poetryrox, and as @allhermususdc.

Jen Karetnick's fourth full-length book is the 2021 CIPA EVVY Gold Medal Winner *The Burning Where Breath Used to Be* (David Robert Books, 2020). Forthcoming books include the chapbook *What Forges Us Steel: The Judge Judy Poems* (Alternating Currents Press). Her work has won the Tiferet Writing Contest for Poetry, Split Rock Review Chapbook Competition, Hart Crane Memorial Prize, and Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize, among other honors, and received fellowships from the Vermont Studio Center, Artists in Residence in the Everglades, the Deering Estate, Maryland Transit Administration, and elsewhere. The co-founder and managing editor of *SWWIM Every Day*, she has recent or forthcoming work in *American Poetry Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Cutthroat*, *DIAGRAM*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Ruminate*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. See www.jkaretnick.com.

Josephine Raye Kelly is a writer, researcher, and multidisciplinary artist smitten by the redwood forests of the Pacific Coast. They hold a Master's in social work with a concentration in community mental health from Cal State East Bay and studied literature with a focus in queer feminist theory at UC Santa Cruz. During the summer of 2022, Josephine co-founded Ouch!, a queer art collective based in the San Francisco Bay Area that uplifts LGBTQIA+ creators.

Frances Klein (she/her) is a poet and teacher writing at the intersection of disability and gender. She is the author of the chapbooks *New and Permanent* (Blanket Sea 2022) and *The Best Secret* (Bottlecap Press, 2022). Klein currently serves as assistant editor of *Southern Humanities Review*. Readers can find more of her work at www.kleinpoetryblog.wordpress.com.

Anna Leahy's latest books are the poetry collections *What Happened Was*: and *Aperture* and the nonfiction book *Tumor*. Her work has appeared in *Aeon*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Atlantic*, *Bennington Review*, *BuzzFeed*, *Poetry*, *Scientific American*, *The Southern Review*, and elsewhere, and her essays have won top awards from *Mississippi Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Dogwood*. She edits the international *Tab Journal*, directs the MFA in Creative Writing program, and co-directs the Health Humanities program at Chapman University. She has been a fellow at MacDowell, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and the American Library in Paris. See more at www.amleahy.com. Follow on Twitter @AMLeahy.

Danielle Lemay is a queer poet and a scientist in central California. She is a Best of the Net nominee and a 2022 Finalist for the Patricia Cleary Miller Award for Poetry at *New Letters*. Her poetry has appeared in *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *The Comstock Review*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *San Pedro River Review*, and many others. More at www.daniellelemay.com.

Raymond Luczak is the author and editor of 30 titles such as *A Quiet Foghorn: More Notes from a Deaf Gay Life* (Gallaudet University Press), *The Last Deaf Club in America: A Novella* (Handtype Press), and *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology* (Squares & Rebels). His twelve poetry collections include *Chlorophyll* (Modern History Press), *Lunafly* (Gnashing Teeth), and *once upon a twin* (Gallaudet University Press), which was selected as a U.P. Notable Book for 2021. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. An inaugural Zoeglossia PoetryFellow, he lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Camille McDaniel is a Southern California-based poet, crochet artist, and cat enthusiast. Their poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Rue Scribe*, *Variety Pack*, and \$; they were also a finalist for the *Frontier Poetry* Industry Prize. She's lived in Boston, Harlem, and Paris and (a true Sagittarius) is constantly fighting the urge to make another drastic change in scenery.

Elizabeth Meade is a poet with Cerebral Palsy who lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She is the daughter of a Cameroonian immigrant mother and London-born American father. Born against the odds of survival at 22.5 weeks, she weighed just 1.1 pounds. This miracle inspires her enthusiastic exploration of life, immense gratitude, and compassionate heart. She began writing poetry when she was 14, shortly after she inexplicably lost her ability to walk. Her poems are forthcoming in *In Between Spaces: An Anthology of Disabled Writers*. She is currently working on the manuscript for her first book of poems.

elena minor is the author of *Titulada*, a book of bilingual poetry. Her work has been published in more than two dozen literary journals, including *The Acentos Review*, *Inlandia*, *Gulf Coast*, *MAKE and Rhino*. Her work has also been anthologized in *Puro Chicanx Writers of the 21st Century*, *Angels of the Americlypse: New Latino Writing*, *Best American Experimental Writing (BAX)*, *Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts in Los Angeles*, and *Resist Much Obey Little: Inaugural Poems to the Resistance*. She is the founding editor and publisher of PALABRA (2006-2012) and taught community-based creative writing to high school students for fourteen years.

Briar Ripley Page grew up in Pennsylvania and currently lives in London. They like fresh tomatoes and dislike the tasteless grocery store kind of tomatoes. Page can be found online at www.brianrripleypage.xyz.

Ellen Peckham is a visual artist, poet, and memoirist born in Rochester, NY in 1938. She frequently uses both art forms in a single work, the text decorating and explicating, the image illuminating. Visit www.ellenpeckham.com for more.

Cara Peterhansel (she/her) is a queer poet from Connecticut. She holds an MFA in poetry from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work explores the intersections of disability, injury, mental illness, queerness, and intimacy. Her work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Stone of Madness*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Defunkt Magazine*. She can be found online at carapeterhansel.com and @CPeterhansel on Twitter.

A two-time Best of the Net nominee, **Suzanne S. Rancourt**, Abenaki/Huron descent, has authored *Billboard in the Clouds* (Northwestern Univ. Press) which received the Native Writers 'Circle of the Americas First Book Award, *murmurs at the gate* (Unsolicited Press, 2019), and *Old Stones, New Roads*, (Main Street Rag Publishing, 2021). Her fourth book is forthcoming from Unsolicited Press, 2023. A USMC and Army Veteran, Rancourt is a multi-modal Expressive Arts Therapist. Advanced degrees include psychology, writing, Credentialed Drug and Alcohol counselor, Aikido and Iaido. Widely published, please explore her website for publications, events, interviews and more: www.expressive-arts.com

heidi andrea restrepo rhodes (she/they) is a queer, sick/disabled, brown/Colombian, poet, scholar, educator, and cultural worker. Her poetry collection, *The Inheritance of Haunting* (University of Notre Dame Press,

2019) won the 2018 Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize. Her chapbook, *Ephemeral*, is the 2022 winner of the Lorca Latinx Poetry Prize and will be published by EcoTheo Collective in 2023. She is a 2023 recipient of the Creative Capital Award, is a VONA alum, and has received poetry fellowships from Zoeglossia, CantoMundo, Radar, VONA, and Yale's Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry*, *Poem-a-Day*, *Split This Rock's Quarry*, *Waxwing*, among other places. She wants to swim with you in the raucous and joyful possibilities of crip poetics and abolition dreams, and currently lives and teaches in Gabrielino Tongva land in the San Gabriel Mountain foothills of southern California.

Zach Semel (he/him) is a poet and essayist pursuing an M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Northern Arizona University. Some of his previous work has appeared or is forthcoming in *DIAGRAM*, *Salamander*, *CutBank: All Accounts & Mixture*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Flyway: Journal of Writing & Environment*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Wordgathering*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, and other places. His hybrid chapbook, *Let the tides take my body*, was awarded the 2021 May Day Mountain Prize by *Hunger Mountain*.

Teo Shannon is a queer, chronically ill, latinx poet. He holds an MFA from Pacific University of Oregon and is pursuing his doctorate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is a co-founder and co-EIC of *Cotton Xenomorph*. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *River Styx*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Shade Journal*, and *Waxwing*. He has a cat named Lysistrata. You can find him on Twitter @TeoShannonPoet.

Sanchari Sur is a PhD candidate in English at Wilfrid Laurier University. Their work can be found in the Toronto Book Award Shortlisted *The Unpublished City* (Book*hug, 2017), *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Room*, *Flare Magazine*, *Daily Xtra*, *Al Jazeera*, *Joyland*, *CBC*, *Toronto Star*, and elsewhere. Sanchari is a recipient of a 2022 Tin House Summer Workshop Residency, 2019 Banff Residency (with Electric Literature), 2018 Lambda Literary Fellowship in fiction, and grants from the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. They curate the Balderdash Reading Series (est. Jan 2017), are the co-editor of *Watch Your Head: Writers and Artists Respond to the Climate Crisis* (Coach House Books, 2020), and the Editor-in-Chief of *The Puritan*.

Chanika Svetvilas is an interdisciplinary artist who utilizes lived experience to create safe spaces, to disrupt stereotypes, and to reflect on contemporary issues. She has presented her interdisciplinary work at Brooklyn Public Library, Westbeth Gallery, Denver International Airport, Asian Arts Initiative, Jamaica Center for

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Aïcha Martine Thiam is a trilingual/multicultural writer, musician, and artist, and might have been a kraken in a past life. She has been nominated for Best of the Net, The Best Small Fictions and The Pushcart Prize. She is the author of *At Sea* (Clash Books), which was shortlisted for the 2019 Kingdoms in the Wild Poetry Prize, and *Burn the Witch*, which is forthcoming with Finishing Line Press. Follow her work: www.amartine.com.

Lourdes Tutaine-Garcia lives in midcoast Maine where she listens to what the ocean tells her, then runs home to write it down. Her debut novel, *The Wooden Sparrow*, will be released early 2023 by Touchpoint Press under the name Isabel Tutaine. More about her work: www.isabeltutaineauthor.com

Habeebullahi Muhammed Yunusa (Başõrun), FrontierXV, is many person(a)s rolled into one: one is a poet in love with the shape and sound of words. Longlisted for 2022 Spectrum International Poetry Competition and shortlisted in July 2019 BPPC Anthology, Habeebullahi has poems published/forthcoming in *Lumiere Review*, *Afristories*, *Turnpike Magazine*, and elsewhere. Currently an English postgraduate, he writes from Shàáré, Kwara, Nigeria. He is on Twitter and Instagram @the_sirbash.

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About the Editor

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