

## JENN MCCREARY

### Better Living Through Chemistry

*This autumn, I lost my poet voice, then began to find it again, creating erasure poems from vintage psychopharmaceutical ads illustrating other women gone quiet.*

There is an ageless collective concept, in history & medicine, in religion & other fairy tales, that knowing the name of a thing gives one power over it. So you begin by grasping at nomenclature. You catalog the uncontrolled weeping, the cold-sweat racing-heart night-waking, the hyperventilated swooning, the progressive social withdrawal. More discreetly, to yourself, you take note of the constant scrabble of claws caged inside your ribs, the prickle of too-tight skin petitioning to be cut to release pressure, the relentless ache of scapulae struggling to unfold & realize their true purpose, bastard alulae no more.

You gather these findings & present them to those more neatly pressed than you currently are & there is discussion of biochemical factors, acknowledgment of authentic environmental influences: *financial insecurity, political climate, ecological collapse, late stage capitalism, ghosting friends, hovering children*, each day's reveal of the latest sexual predator. You are rewarded, given names by the mouthful: *severe major depressive episode, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder with agoraphobia*.

You roll these names around in your mouth, press at them with your tongue, chew on them tentatively & think: *it has been named, like Rumpelstiltskin*, & anticipate the promised power, to spin yourself back into gold.

While you wait for the spell to break, your pieces knit themselves together again, you are given another list, a prescribed list of things to put in your

mouth, varicolored & multi-shaped things which fill amber plastic bottles & stand in rows like sentinels on your nightstand. You swallow dutifully, or dissolve sublingually, look them up on your phone, skim side effects, contraindications, interactions, timing of efficacy. & while you do, you begin to also see old photos of women, women out of time, reflecting back at you your symptoms, your life—your lives a series of symptoms mirrored back & listed from vintage glossy pages, & while you see yourself in the women, the words there are not theirs, they are about & for, & so you pick up a brush & begin to reassemble the vernacular, you endeavor to paint the proper words into their mouths.



Bright

the chronically fatigued, chronically ill,  
 pathetic and pressed patient, the  
 patient sedated the child  
 with

**in**

press  
 mine bright and  
 new —  
 prove perform  
 little  
 press or pulse  
 (peach colored), (yellow), (light blue).



**Keep her**

at peace  
control  
accomplished

—

...shaky

Keep her

...shuffle

...and keep her

keep her  
outside.

That way, you can  
inside...and

—Fun  
management

total  
ease.



um ?



**I  
help you**

put up with all this  
too.

Follow

easily



