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Jaime Chernoch

*University of Massachusetts Boston*

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AFFLICTIONARY: DEFINING DISABILITY AND CHRONIC ILLNESS THROUGH  
POETIC DICTIONARY ENTRIES

A Thesis Presented

by

JAIME CHERNOCH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,  
University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2021

Creative Writing Program

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## ABSTRACT

### AFFLICTIONARY: DEFINING DISABILITY AND CHRONIC ILLNESS THROUGH POETIC DICTIONARY ENTRIES

December 2021

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Directed by Professor Lillian-Yvonne Bertram

*Afflictionary, Defining Disability and Chronic Illness Through Poetic Dictionary Entries* is a poetry collection that uses the format of a dictionary to explore individualized experiences of both medical and non-medical words. The definitions and reference quotes that come before the poems come from the Oxford English Dictionary and various medical journals. The quotes act as a prompt or framework that helped shape the personal entries. They may echo the content in the poems, be placed in opposition, or complicate our understanding of the word. Some of the words list multiple years of personal entries which shows the chronic and recurrent nature of that word in the speaker's journey with chronic illness and disability. By placing formal definitions alongside the personal experiences these experiences become legitimized and help define disability and chronic illness to readers who may not understand these aspects of identity.

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Aa

affliction, n.

/ə'flɪkʃ(ə)n/

1. A disease or other condition causing ill health, pain, etc.; an illness, an ailment.
2. Something which afflicts a person; a cause of pain, misery, or distress.

1701 J. Pulleyn *Art of Contentment* 18 What have we comparable to the Afflictions, which many others groan under?

1811 S. T. Coleridge *Coll. Lett.* (1971) VI. 1027 Great cures in rheumatic afflictions of uncertain ... kind.

1999 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I wake up at three years old and can't walk. My parents try to puzzle out my affliction: *did she trip? twist her ankle? some other unforeseen tragedy inflicted upon our first born?* The doctors reveal fluid build-up in my left ankle. Of course I remember nothing, but images have been placed in my mind to fill the hazy quiet of the past known only through sporadic retellings. I can still see the toy they gave me; bouncing top on the metal track as I wait for the procedure. At least that image is clear, pale hospital blanket pilling all over, bumps of collected cotton speckling the terrain of comfort.



anomalous, adj.  
/ə'nomələs/

Unconformable to the common order; deviating from rule, irregular; abnormal.

1872 O. W. Holmes *Poet at Breakfast-table* xi. 347 Peculiar and anomalous in her likes and dislikes.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* The rash appears to be anomalous: the herald patch just inches from my birthmark. Pityriasis rosea the initial diagnosis with no link to preexisting conditions. Unrelated treatments required: steroid mouth wash, 5 mL; numbing wash, 4 mL. I dislike both. The three tubes of antifungal cream sit ready on my dresser. Follow up in four weeks via telehealth video conferencing.

anti-inflammatory, adj. and n.  
/ ,æŋ ,taɪən 'flæmə ,tɔəri/

1. *Med.* That reduces inflammation; of or relating to the reduction of inflammation.
2. That tends to inhibit or reduce in intensity or impact; mollifying, moderating.

1951 *Jrnl. Amer. Med. Assoc.* 22 Dec. 1631 Hydro-cortisone acetate had a constant anti-inflammatory effect on the rheumatoid arthritic joint.

2014 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Nothing seems to lessen it, my puffed-out left ankle. Even the x-ray guided fluid removal, even the handfuls of methotrexate – such small pills promising relief. The doctor's calm voice serves as a makeshift anti-inflammatory agent: *no need to worry, I'll be watching the rheumatology fellow as they inject you for practice.*

Bb

Behçet's disease, n.

/'bā-səts-/ /di-'zēz/

A chronic disease featuring inflammation of small blood vessels and characterized by a triad of features: ulcers in the mouth, ulcers of the genitalia, and inflammation of the eye (uveitis). The mouth ulcers typically present as recurring crops of aphthous ulcers. Arthritis is also commonplace. The cause is not known. It is more frequent and severe in patients from the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia than in those of European descent.

2003 D. H. Verity et al. *Br J Ophthalmol* Behçet's disease owes its name to the Turkish physician professor Huluci Behçet, who, in 1937, described the classic trisymptom complex of hypopyon, iritis, and orogenital aphthosis.

2018 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* This is the diagnosis I was finally able to wring out of them. Hours in the ER, threats to call infectious disease, mumblings from the woman on the other side of the curtain ... *that hurts! Don't you have a softer comb? I need to shower.* They used cell phone flashlights and squinted eyes to inspect what I thought was the loudest pain on my body. Not loud nor bright enough. Derm took no time in announcing their thoughts, agreed with my mom's initial assumptions. Behçet's disease. But even now, two years later, I redefine this to doctors weekly. They rely on the clinical definition versus the physical manifestations evidenced on my skin, on my scalp, in my throat.

body, n.  
/'bɑdi/

The complete physical form of a person or animal; the assemblage of parts, organs, and tissues that constitutes the whole material organism.

1752 S. Johnson *Rambler* No. 208. ¶10 A body languishing with disease.

1925 *Woman's World* (Chicago) Apr. 48/4 (adv.) Those sturdy little bodies are built up by long, healthful hours of sleep.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* My body is not parallel to my age. The angle of my ankle is skewed by fluid. The padding on my knee is puffed, sluggish. My weight weighs heavy when doses of prednisone burst on my tongue but weans when the frantic rush of my hands settle. I drape tie dye and floral and pastel over my limbs to cheer their demeanor. I pick at the scabs on my face that bubble up blood. My ears flush with fear anytime needles need to poke, and my eyes fade to black. I tell myself I'm small, like a child. I don't feel the age on my hospital bracelet. My body can do some things; yoga stretches to ground me, rollerblading to simulate flight. But rest always come after and my body heaves back to bed, time to hibernate in my cave till Spring arrives.

Cc

chronic, adj.  
/'krɒnɪk/

1. Continuous, constant. Used colloquially as a vague expression of disapproval: bad, intense, severe, objectionable; also *something chronic* adverbial phrase, severely, badly.
2. Of diseases, etc.: Lasting a long time, long-continued, lingering, inveterate; opposed to acute.

1813 J. Thomson *Lect. Inflammation* 128 Chronic inflammations are found to differ from the acute, not only by the greater degree of mildness, but, in some instances, by a real or apparent absence of the constitutional symptoms or fever by which inflammation is usually accompanied.

1871 E. F. Burr *Ad Fidem* viii. 142 Chronic doubts require chronic relieving.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* My youngest sister once wrote on a pink heart-shaped sticky note: “Get well soon! - Anime Trash.” I don’t remember the particular pain, its duration or location, or if I felt much better after than during. Chronic problems since youth, since I learned how to tie my shoes. An unstable ankle, throat filled with ulcers, ears oozing with puss. I keep the sticky note stuck to my bedside lamp, a reminder of something I can’t control. It began to fall off as the adhesive dried up, so I put a small bit of tape on the back. At least I can fix the stick, place it to be chronically reminding me. Its pale pink edges furling, but the message still visible while I work at my desk or lie in my bed between bouts of recurring pain.

community, n.  
/kə'mjunədi/

A body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity. Hence: a place where a particular body of people lives.

1711 R. Steele *Spectator* No. 49. ¶3 Those little Communities which we express by the word Neighbourhoods.

1931 A. Christie *Sittaford Myst.* xvi. 123 In this little community of ours the smallest detail is known.

2016 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Small walled communities and smaller webs. Hands clasping familiar hands. I never chose these halls or these hands, born into a pattern, born into an enclosure. But the swelling welled up in my ankle and I burst from the walls and webs. Choosing my identifiers, choosing person first or the swell. My heeled feet did not announce me to others, hiding my right to admission, right to a spot close to the door. I deceived myself until now, thinking the swell not loud enough, not puffed out or proud enough. Braces and pills and placards were insufficient. My car told it should wear a bumper sticker with my body's deficiencies. I ask myself *do I want this?* I ask why, as if trust was a myth.

comorbidity, n.  
/ˌkɒmôrˈbɪdədi/

The simultaneous presence of two chronic diseases or conditions in a patient.

2009 J. M. Valderas et al. *Ann Fam Med*. Comorbidity has also been used to convey the notion of burden of illness or disease, defined by the total burden of physiological dysfunction or the total burden of types of illnesses having an impact on an individual's physiologic reserve.

2019 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* After the methotrexate, the Simponi, the Humira, comorbidities started accumulating. My body had no defense, no immune response to stop their arrival. At work with the children, singing "Let It Go" and hearing only half of the shrill girls chime in when the snow machine went off. Blowing air out while I pinched my nose. Pressure never relieving. I'd drink water tasting of poison, eating cough drops to mask the dry and rancid landscape of my tongue. On lunch breaks, I'd take photos of the rashes on my legs and chest, pityriasis rosea the likely culprit. Doctors never draw connections, only scribble circles around the borders of my red, markers for when it gets bigger. They never say what I have is related to what I've had; new diagnoses always shinier than the old scripts they've prescribed.

co-pay, n.  
/'kou,peɪ/

In medical insurance: a contribution made by an insured patient towards the cost of treatment or other medical services.

2003 *Wall St. Jrnl.* 16 June a1/5 Drugs that used to require co-pays of \$5 and \$10 just a few years ago are now costing her as much as \$40 each in copays.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I got a letter in the mail, unstable fingers ripping into the prepaid postage: a bill that willed one thousand tiny co-pays to accumulate out of me. I opted for monthly money-letting. A reverse ATM transaction, transfusing what little was offered to me for my services rendered only to be ripped out like the IV on my right hand when they took the fluids from my knee while I slept on happy gas clouds. *Count back with me. 3. 2. 1.* And then I was smaller. Didn't know the cost of that nap in a bed that wasn't mine. Still don't know how fractions work. If I'm so small and they're so big, why is this my amount to settle? Why is even the paper worth more?



## Dd

diagnosis, n.  
/dʌɪəɡ'neʊsɪs/

*Medicine.* Determination of the nature of a diseased condition; identification of a disease by careful investigation of its symptoms and history; also, the opinion (formally stated) resulting from such investigation.

1872 S. W. Baker *Nile Tributaries Abyssinia* (new ed.) i. 8 The crows can form a pretty correct diagnosis upon the case of a sick camel.

1999 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Thought to be infant ankles, thought to be too young. Given the diagnosis anyway, given the Motrin, the indoor summer with an ankle brace. I don't remember crying, my mom tells me I was so brave. I only remember the fairy potions on the slate stone, the colorful ribbons, the way I still played despite the rigid ankle and pooling swell.

2014 J.L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I was handed a faulty diagnosis by a smiley doctor. I became caricature, doll to poke with needles. *Put soap in your ear, take antibiotics – that will stop the tremors.* Dolls clothes taken off and put back on. It only took her a moment with my red ear and ooze. Disregarding the smiling man and his playtime pills, I put the drops in. Stillness.

2018 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Strep throat can only be blamed so many times. *Do you pray? Do you have a boyfriend?* Pain can be released like pebbles sinking into water according to most doctors. My pain can be released as long as it's strep or herpes or an unknown virus. The diagnosis does not matter. I keep my pain pebbles bunched together, try to paint an opal sheen, try to skip them across a lake far away, try to grind them into powder and blow them away. But the ulcers are real. I cannot paint them. An iPhone flashlight does not reveal them. Squinting doctors' eyes do not see them. But finally, they diagnose them: Behcet's disease. The pebbles have a name, they meet the criteria, they have FDA approved drugs and therapies.

doctor, n.  
/'daktər/

A doctor of medicine; in popular current use, applied to any medical practitioner. Also: (amongst indigenous peoples) a traditional healer or diviner, *esp.* one dealing with afflictions thought to be caused by spirit possession or witchcraft.

1654 R. Whitlock *Zωοτομία* 107 Many Medicasters, pretenders to Physick, buy the degree of Doctor abroad.

1858 *Compendium of Kaffir Laws & Customs* 123 Doctors are not entitled to fees, except a cure is performed, or the patient relieved.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Nurse Darlington was there in the delivery room, there in kindergarten as my teacher. Dr. Valles said a prayer when I was born. Dr. Min would cup my cherub face in her hands. Cross over care. Now I am blood counts. A rheumatoid factor test result. I am possible liver disease. A high sed rate and CRP. I am hours in the ER until clinic ends. I am invisible when lights are shone on me. I am given medicines for “kicks and giggles.” I am obvious. I am impossible. My red ears are a dead giveaway. *At least your ankle is better.* I am only sick without a boyfriend. I am only sick without God. My heart is anxious, asymptomatic, and leaking. My non-aural migraines are not covered by insurance. I am a dose of \$1,000. I am child in the eyes of Aetna. I am no longer pediatric phlebotomy. I am tears on the purple faux-leather bed. I am the nurse that says, “this is the last time you can come here.” I now sit upright when they take it away.

Ee

evidence, n.

/ˈeɪvədə(ə)ns/

Grounds for belief; facts or observations adduced in support of a conclusion or statement; the available body of information indicating whether an opinion or proposition is true or valid.

1815 J. Smith *Panorama Sci. & Art* I. 457 The evidence of sight is corrected by the judgment.

2019 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* My bodily evidence is photographed by dermatologists in a room with diagonal curtains. They mumble terms to each other that were quieter than the buzz of the medical lights staged around me. I wish I knew them now or when the specialty pharmacist told me about the months long prior authorization process, the letters of appeal, the delayed letters of denial of coverage, the rain that ruined the edges of insurance company letterhead. I bounced between operators on the phone, miming to my mom about another setback, another *we can't help you*, another voice channeling southern charm while I freeze under feet of snow. They keep asking for more evidence, more ways that everyone and everything else has failed me and my tired body. I'm asked to perform on paper the pain that seeps out of me without my doing. Mental health services started to call: *where is Jaime Chernoch, we can't speak to you; Father, Mother; we need it from her*. Phishing schemes, pain medication scams, proof that I could be faking it. The FDA finally approved it, their evidence stronger, more real than my scars, my scabs, the sight of me. That first dose - a small bottle with orange pills - felt like an end, but the pain never did.

## Ff

fear, n.  
/fiə/

1. A state of alarm or dread.
2. Apprehensive feeling towards anything regarded as a source of danger, or towards a person regarded as able to inflict injury or punishment.

1736 Bp. J. Butler *Analogy of Relig.* i. iii. 49 This State of Fear being itself often a very considerable Punishment.

2000 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Back then, the fear was cloudy. A word on the tongues of adults while I'm handed sugar free lollipops waiting for the procedure. My focus was on the sweet, the syrup, never the slice or import or export of fluids. My hands tugging at hospital sheets, my eyes wandering along the pastel painted walls. The bed felt like a big crib, icy metal bars on the sides. Little capsule for me and my teddy. At least I think I had one.

2017 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* The nurse did not applaud my theatrics, my fear. The sight of the needle was enough to start the shaking, the tears, the convulsive sobs. Air escaped me like many small birds and their patterned flight from trees or wires. I am more like the wire now. Injected with electricity or a substance to repress. Immune responses on halt. Fevers a far-away heat my body no longer travels to. My mom takes up the task, delaying this self-duty for several years. I test the angle of the auto-injector one day and click it with my own arthritic thumb. Count 20 seconds. Little red blip of blood. Band-Aids sent by insurance cover it up.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* This time I was prepared: floral t-shirt, stickers and poems, plush pink weighted dragon to keep me from floating on fear. I would do this. Face the infusion in a small room with me, the dragon, my mom, and the nurse. But we were ripped from that room. COVID found a day later in that building. Now I shuffle over to a satellite clinic every four weeks and sit in a big public room with only curtains. An audience of the elderly and cancer restarts the process. My veins hide every time and blooming bruises multiply with every failed sticking of the needle.

## Gg

guess, v.  
/ges/

To form an approximate judgement of (size, amount, number, distance, etc.) without actual measurement or calculation; to estimate.

1804 W. Tennant *Indian Recreat.* II. 38 Boiled down to a proper consistence, which they guess by the eye, and by the touch.

2017 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I assumed it was neurological, the sudden spasms originating in my throbbing ears. I'd sit staring in math class, losing all memory of SOHCAHTOA, only focusing on the shivers, the activating itch in the osseous and membranous labyrinth. The initial visit with the pediatric neurologist elicited medications for *kicks and giggles* and guessing at tic disorders; a PANDAS diagnosis the new and fashionable way to get recognized in the field. I was told to soap my ears in the shower, take antibiotics, do anything that sounded like homeopathy. Suds dripped down my neck in the shower, my body still quaking with every tap of my tragus and I quit that doctor; a doctor his senior suggesting an ENT. She did not guess, the redness of my ears apparent the moment I sat down. Relapsing polychondritis. Prescription: ciprodex suspension drops stockpiled by the government to combat anthrax. Fifty-dollar ear dryer shaped like a seashell with interchangeable pastel tips. The drops stopped the tremors, the shell stopped the leaking, the redness left me but so did the math.

## Hh

heal, v.  
/hil/

To make whole or sound in bodily condition; to free from disease or ailment, restore to health or soundness; to cure (*of* a disease or wound).

1842 Ld. Tennyson *Morte d'Arthur* in *Poems* (new ed.) II. 16 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

1846 R. C. Trench *Notes Miracles* 8 Christ, healing a sick man with his word.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* There's always temporary forms of healing. I try new drugs when the last stops working. One symptom replaces another. The cast healed the ankle but made my shoulders uneven. The medicine healed the ulcers but quickened my pulse, my mind into mania. There is no cure-all, no one solution. Healing is segmented and never all at once. Many processes, many doses, many days of pain with gaps of relief.

humor, n.  
/'(h)jumər/

1. In ancient and medieval physiology and medicine: any of four fluids of the body (blood, phlegm, choler, and so-called melancholy or black bile) believed to determine, by their relative proportions and conditions, the state of health and the temperament of a person or animal.
2. The ability of a person to appreciate or express what is funny or comical; a sense of what is amusing or ludicrous. See also *sense of humor n.*

1598 F. Meres *Palladis Tamia* f. 146 The foure humors of the body (heate, coldnes, drines, and moisture) are the causes of all welfare and ill fare in the body.

1887 J. R. Lowell *Democracy & Other Addr.* 3 That modulating and restraining balance-wheel which we call a sense of humor.

2009 *Libr. Jrn. Rev.* (Nexis) 15 Feb. 104 The vivid imagination, humor, and honesty of a storyteller.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Vomiting on the toilet I laugh, and my mom is confused. *What's so funny?* I just sit and smile into the bowl, but don't answer. I catalogue this moment, and subsequent moments. Laughing with doctors, with nurses, with receptionists about all the pains this child's body has. How am I smiling? I held a frog over the sink in my cabin, the girls giggling and spraying soda at me. We catch daddy long legs in cups, but I still end up sick. Summer camp should be fever haze, but I remember the white band on my wrist, the right to swim in the shallows. The hours, the spiking temperature on the ride home, the tests, the blue Gatorade, learning origami with my mom, paper boxes and yellow punch buggies out the window. Too many fluids, humors, panging bladder and laughter. Still. Humor to laugh about infusions and bringing my stuffed dragon with me at twenty-four. An excess of fluids in almost every part of my body: my ankle, my knee, my hands, my heart. Proportions puffed out by attacking the self. And still I laugh. On the phone, Instagram selfie with tubes and monitors. Fashionable johnny with child's print to match my smallness. No matter the size, grinning into pillows when they remove the blood, the phlegm, the bile, the melancholy.

invisible, adj.  
/ɪnˈvɪzɪb(ə)l/

That cannot be seen; that by its nature is not an object of sight.

1880 A. Geikie *Elem. Lessons Physical Geogr.* (new ed.) ii. 75 They collect in a visible form the ever-present invisible vapour of the air.

2017 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I spent three days in Buffalo with a friend and her partner. They were my disability research captives: offered a road trip in return for their confident driving and ability to utilize hot tubs effectively (always ask for more towels). I took photos of adaptive cars and forks while they ordered the uber to the tea bar. We had finger sandwiches paired with chambongs. I got dizzy after two shots. Our last day we saw a lunar eclipse, or the lack in the sky that mirrored the lack in my leg. I presented the data at the conference and found a note on my car: “Not trying to be rude, but you shouldn’t use this parking spot unless the placard is yours. Usually placard users have limited mobility or issue/complication with the heart. Please be thoughtful of others. Thanks.” The blue stain from the two AM ice cream cake must’ve been invisible. My work misplaced. That trip an excursion in lying to myself about just how fucking disabled I really am.



## Jj

jaw, n.  
/dʒɔ/

1. One of the bones (or sets of bones) forming the framework of the mouth, and the seizing, biting, or masticating apparatus of vertebrates
2. *figurative* (in *plural*) The seizing action or capacity of any devouring agency, as death, time, etc.

1822 P. B. Shelley *Peter Bell III* i, in *Poet. Wks.* (?1840) 238/2. There was a silent chasm Between his upper jaw and under.

1886 R. Broughton (1899) *Dr. Cupid* xxvi. 254 And as for him, poor little fellow, I cannot bear to be unkind to him, when he is only just out of the jaws of death.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* By now I've visited pain in every dream and she's never wearing the same clothes. This time she's embedded in my jawline, jumping out at me as I drive or while workshoping poems with friends. I offer her trinkets and garments, cover up her hurt, smother her tears with cotton tissues from cardboard boxes. I never ask for help when she's numbing. I never ask and only ice. But I reach the limit, which is redefined in every encounter with her. Mango popsicles could not sweeten her demeanor. She continued to float around the hemisphere between my teeth and jaw. Coaxing her out never lasts as long as I hope.

## Kk

know, v.  
/noʊ/

To apprehend or comprehend as fact or truth; to have a clear or distinct perception or apprehension of; to understand or comprehend with clearness and feeling of certainty; to be cognizant or aware of.

1855 T. B. Macaulay *Hist. Eng.* IV. xvii. 56 It seems probable that ... he did not know his own mind.

1911 J. Conrad *Let.* 20 Oct. (1956) 232 You don't know the truth when you see it—unless it smells of cabbage-soup.

2013 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Trigonometry makes no sense. Even less sense when my body likes to shake the answers out of my brain. Sitting in my math class desk, tapping my ear and feeling the newly minted shivers return. To know the angle of my trigger, to know its goal. Knowledge unknown to the teacher, to the doctor, to me. Being told to wash out the reactions with soap. Spasms made to dissipate with medications meant for pneumonia. I don't have pneumonia. My ears are clean. They aren't guilty.

L1

liminal, adj.  
/'lɪmɪnəl/

1. Characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc.
2. *Cultural Anthropology*. Of or relating to a transitional or intermediate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life, esp. as marked by a ritual or rite of passage; characterized by liminality

1916 T. M. Kettle *Ways of War* (1917) 232 So much is liminal; it lies across the threshold of any temple of peace that can be imagined.

2008 J. E. Jackson *American Ethnologist* 333 [U]nderstanding of chronic pain stigma as a process in which chronic pain, by profoundly challenging mind–body dualism, presents a dilemma that turns the person embodying that dilemma, the chronic pain sufferer, into a sublimely liminal creature whose uncertain ontological status provokes stigmatizing reactions in others.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I don't understand myself. I'm asked to scale my pain with pictures. I'm asked to locate a hurt that migrates. I don't always have the answers they're looking for, if they look at all. Caught on the liminal rungs of a ladder I built while I was still considered 'well.' The building costs everything and so I slip back into hazy territory. A place where at least I'm familiar with the idea of shifting margins. Relapsable symptoms not even the stockpiled anthrax-combatting medicated drops could relieve. Some doctors see my darting eyes, looking from door to floor to calendar. They have nothing to give but another strep test when they know how my throat screams otherwise. They scratch the bumps just beyond the scope of the eye and I feel seen. Tests come back negative. Again. They swab. Again. Repeating and I'm still never really well, unwell – well at least they tried. At least they tried.

loss, n.  
/las/

The being deprived of, or the failure to keep (a possession, appurtenance, right, quality, faculty, or the like).

1398 J. Trevisa tr. Bartholomew de Glanville *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1495) vi. v. 193 Chyldren wepe more for the losse of an apple than for the losse of theyr herytage.

1671 J. Milton *Samson Agonistes* 67 O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Every symptom I gain and lose. The multiple ulcers and the loss of appetite. The additional fluid in my ankle and the loss of mobility. New medications bring new relief and take away something undefinable. I lose a part of me, the original Jaime, the way I was without the suppression of immune response. I feel minimized, smaller pain but smaller joy as well.

## Mm

medicine, n.  
/'medəs(ə)n/

A substance or preparation used in the treatment of illness; a drug; *esp.* one taken by mouth.

1741–3 J. Wesley *Extract of Jrnl.* (1749) 15 One of the mistresses lay..near death, having found no help from all the medicines she had taken.

1915 V. Woolf *Voy. Out* x. 143 Talk was the medicine she trusted to.

2000 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* When they found the source of the puff in my ankle they prescribed children's Motrin. Its sickly orange tang never easy to stomach. I was supposed to go to the nurse's office at lunch, but I always seemed to forget. Pills aren't much easier to swallow than that liquid. Now I'm older and the pills have been replaced with needles, monthly. I've been prescribed bursts of prednisone, magic mouth wash, steroid ear drops, emergency antibiotics in the middle of a root canal, at-home injections, three types of migraine medication with names that all sound the same, hours long infusions where the nurses can't ever seem to find the vein.

memory, n.  
/'mɛm(ə)ri/

The perpetuated knowledge or recollection (*of* something); that which is remembered *of* a person, object, or event; (good or bad) posthumous reputation.

1597 T. Morley *Plaine & Easie Introd. Musicke* 5 I should haue a verie good wit, for I haue but a bad memorie.

1640 R. Brathwait *Two Lancs. Lovers* xxiv. 186 With your favour be it, that I reteine so thankfull a memory of his professed fancie, as for the present to affiance my selfe to none.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* My brain does not hold an accurate record of symptoms expressed. The gyrus folds lose those valuable bits of language that activate advice from doctors and good-intentioned homeopaths. I can remember the red envelope filled with turmeric powder; my name scrawled in black pen on the front. I do not know the pain that willed its placing. I start to use an app to re-acquire the moments of pain, but forget which folder its pixels reside in. *How many migraines have you had this month, this week?* What is the purpose of memory when everything is one big chronic forgotten?

Nn

needle, n.

/'nid(ə)l/

*Medicine and Surgery.* A thin, sharply pointed, hollow tube used to aspirate fluid or air from the body, inject drugs and other solutions, etc., usually as an attachment to, or part of, a syringe; (also) a hollow tubular instrument used to obtain small samples of tissue for biopsy.

1883 C. H. Fagge *Princ. & Pract. Med.* (1886) I. 926 One should never employ for tapping the chest the hollow needles which are commonly sold with the aspiratory apparatus.

2017 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Needles never involved my own active hands. I could lay them limp in my lap or tightly netted in a scarf by my neck. When asked to perform the role of self-nurse, seizing, I choked on air. The nurse asking my mother if I was under the influence. My mind was commanded only by fear of my own hands. I was now both the fear and the feared. Whose words would comfort the puncture? Who would I blame for such an upset?

new, adj.  
/n(j)u/

Not previously known or experienced; now known or experienced for the first time.

1582 *Bible* (Rheims) Acts xvii. 20 May we know what this new doctrine is that thou speakest of? For thou bringest in certaine new things to our eares.

1638 R. Baker tr. J. L. G. de Balzac *New Epist.* II. 30 Your part is not so much to bring it forth as a new matter, as to keepe it up as a knowne good.

2014 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I have a new swell in my ankle. Similar to the old, sticking to that left ankle but different. Like fabric that reveals a new color when you stroke it this way and that. Stroking the egg-shaped lump causes pain, new pain. I see a new doctor, he's impressed with the isolation of the swell and its location. Allows new hands to remove the fluid. I'd prefer old ones, ones that know the correct angle and have seen this sort of mound before. We try medicine after new medicine. Nothing works. Exchange one cast for a stylish new pink one. I adorn it with stickers I've collected and add new ones when those tear away. I get fitted again when my leg loses muscle mass. New dimensions and new plastic.



nurse, n.  
/nɜrs/

A person (historically usually a woman) who cares for the sick or infirm; (now chiefly) *spec.* a person professionally qualified for this activity. Also: an assistant to a medical professional.

1616 W. Shakespeare *Comedy of Errors* (1623) v. i. 99 I will attend my husband, be his nurse, Diet his sicknesse, for it is my Office.

1876 J. S. Bristowe *Treat. Theory & Pract. Med.* i. i. 230 Nurses and medical attendants rarely,..take the disease from patients under their charge.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Sometimes I get over eager. I explain to the nurse details they can't understand, symptoms they nod along to and write in my chart. They think counting down will help with needles, their closeness in age rarely a comfort. I'm the sick young person, you are the young nurse treating the sick young ones. They are almost always women, kind smiles, ponytail hair. They speak sweetly to the elderly patients in the chairs around me, but shuffle past when I look up. Maybe seeing me confuses them. Pain they don't understand at an age they do.

Oo

option, n.  
/'ɒpʃ(ə)n/

Something that is or may be chosen; an alternative, a choice.

1824 H. J. Stephen *Treat. Princ. Pleading* ii. §1. 254 As the party has no option in accepting the issue, when well tendered, and as the similitur may in that case be added for him, the acceptance of the issue when well tendered, may be considered as a mere matter of *form*.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* In the mall I walked anonymously by shops. The doctor called and made me feel too visible. *Your newfound allergy leaves us with one last option: infusions*. I begged loudly and specifically against this. Passersby witnessed a desperate girl bargain with an immoveable moment. I relied on bribery to keep me from opting out, my opposition still strong with every elevator button I pressed.; the circular ring of light glowing against my kitchen gloves. And of course it was during a pandemic. Infused with the removal of my immune system. I rewarded the nurses with peach shaped stickers while I got tightly wrapped hot pink gauze to cover the marks they left on me.

open, adj.  
/'oʊp(ə)n/

Of the ears: listening, attentive, receptive. *with open ears*: attentively. *to lend* (also *give*) (*an*) *open ear* and variants: to give one's full attention, esp. with the implication of receptiveness or open-mindedness.

1709 R. Gould *To Right Reverend Father in God Gilbert, Bishop of Sarum* in *Wks.* I. 95 Heav'ns Ear is open when good Princes kneel.

1794 T. Holcroft *Adventures Hugh Trevor* II. vi. 80 I still had an open ear for vanity, which was not a little tickled by the frequent terms of applause and admiration.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I have to be open, always. Open to medications, open to hearing them say my symptoms aren't impressive. I take pills that leave me open to other diseases. I have to open up about pain in private places. My mouth gapes open when they shine a light to see the ulcers. My eyes, though, stay shut when they jab me with needles I was forced to be open to. My biggest fear met with open arms but hiding veins. They don't want to open up. Want to collapse into themselves.

Pp

pain, n.  
/peɪn/

Physical or bodily suffering; a continuous, strongly unpleasant or agonizing sensation in the body (usually in a particular part), such as arises from illness, injury, harmful physical contact, etc.

1742 H. Fielding *Joseph Andrews* II. iv. xi. 263 The Beau hopped about the Room, shaking his Head; partly from Pain, and partly from Anger. [View more context for this quotation](#)

1877 H. James *American* xxii. 403 He had a fit of his great pain, and he asked her for his medicine.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I often forget my pain. I can recall its location, its relative intensity. But I don't hold a grudge against it, I easily let go. I let my body go out into the sun despite the pocking marks it sometimes leaves on my legs. I walk for miles in the city despite the deep aches that surface the next morning. I indulge in acidic foods – the sweet tang of a fresh mango or ketchup with fries – knowing the hiding ulcers could crop up and seer with pain.

pathergy, n.  
\ˈpɑθ-ər-jē\

Pathergy is an exaggerated skin injury occurring after minor trauma such as bump, bruise, needle stick injury. A more severe injury, such as a surgical procedure, can result in persistent ulceration in a patient with pathergy. It typically occurs in patients with Behçet's disease.

2020 S. Rahman & S. Daveluy NCBI *Pathergy Test* Furthermore, the diameter of the needle used has also been related to pathergy. Whereas a 26 gauge disposable needle gave a 35.8% positive SPT in patients with BD, a 20 gauge needle elicited 62.5% positive reactions. Fine needles likely inflict insufficient trauma to reliably induce a pathergy reaction, and most clinicians recommend the use of a thick 20 gauge needle for SPT.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I induce pathergy every time my hip dips into my doorframe. The criteria is met all over : on my hands, feet, scalp, and chest. Scars from bug bites I got at a BBQ last summer now covered by winter socks. Shaving nicks that stay red on my shins even after the hair has grown and grown. I don't need the 20 gauge to know my body won't heal along normal timelines. The tops of my hands share twin bruises every five weeks when they attempt the blood draw at the clinic.

prednisone, n.  
/'pred-nə-,sōn/

A corticosteroid that prevents the release of substances in the body that cause inflammation. It also suppresses the immune system. It is used as an anti-inflammatory or an immunosuppressant medication and treats many different conditions such as allergic disorders, skin conditions, ulcerative colitis, arthritis, lupus, psoriasis, or breathing disorders.

2014 Z. Saleh, T. Arayssi *Ther Adv Chronic Dis*. In both patients, treatment with prednisone, colchicine, several immunosuppressive agents, etanercept, and infliximab led to either short efficacy or side effects.

2019 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Prednisone Jaime likes to make cookies and brownies at the same time, accusing sisters of hogging the oven. Prednisone Jaime talks faster than her tongue, walks faster than everyone else. She feels hot, no need for a coat in the winter, or the extra blankets at night. She sweats, she has a racing heart. Prednisone Jaime has moon-face and acne and extra weight around her waist (she needs it though). Prednisone Jaime can finally eat without the pain of swallowing. The food no longer scratches up against sores in the throat. Prednisone Jaime feels amazing but anxious. She feels awake but too much.

Qq

quick, adv.  
/kwɪk/

Moving, or able to move, with speed; swift; doing something swiftly or in a short time.

1946 A. Christie *Hollow* x. 90 He turned sharply, a man very quick in his reactions. But he was not quick enough. His eyes widened in surprise, but there was no time for him to make a sound.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Time is never quick when pain inevitably returns. A day passes slow with pain in the jaw, or ankle, or head. The nausea grows when nurse needles linger too long in the vein. They ask me to press the cotton pad down, an eternity between myself and the pregnant nurse across the room. It quickens the flush of blood from my head and face. They give me scrubs for the quick vomit that came from my mouth. I rush to the car. It's my birthday. The years are slow but quickly approaches 26: when insurance is no longer my parents' burden.

quiet, adj.  
/'kwaɪət/

1. Of a thing: moving or stirring very little; inactive; still. Also (esp. in later use): making little or no noise; (of a sound) subdued, muted; opposed to loud.
2. quiet disease n. *Medicine* rare asymptomatic or inactive disease.

1885 R. L. Stevenson & F. Stevenson *Dynamiter* 185 He was conscious of a certain regular and quiet sound.

2005 *Amer. Jnl. Ophthalmol.* 140 510/1 Studies of corticosteroid-sparing agents ... in patients on chronic corticosteroid treatment with quiet disease.

2018 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Eldest child syndrome. People pleasing to the point of self-injury. Phone calls with doctors where I don't ask any of the questions that sit perched in my brain, squirrels with their inquisitive tails flicking and flicking. I never ask. They gather the acorns pooling in the corners, knocking around in my brain so loud that I think maybe the nurse hears them too. She doesn't. I don't tell her about the fear, about the fuzz, the ear ringing, the jab in my heart. She's pregnant and she has me clamp my hand on the gauze on my arm. She removes the tubes from the collapsible side table, my DOB printed in black ink. It's today. I don't tell her that either. The distance between her, my arm, my hand, that gauze – far enough for the clicking acorns to spill over into speech. *I'm gonna puke*. Quiet broken by sudden language.



Rr

rest, v.  
/rest/

To take rest by lying down or relaxing, and esp. by going to sleep; to lie still to refresh oneself, to lie asleep.

1791 A. Radcliffe *Romance of Forest* II. viii. 1 She had not rested well.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Rest is closing one eye while scrolling TikTok. Rest is the stranger on the T seeing my Bledsoe boot, but I decline their seat. Rest is slumping over my chemistry homework, memorizing all the elements, red eyes staring down the chemical bonds. Rest is also the art professor's couch and offer of hot tea. Is also canceling on my tutees. Is also buying the Doritos and the cookies. Rest can be the avoidance and abundance.

rheumatoid arthritis, n.  
/ˌrumətɔɪd ar'θraɪtɪs/

Rheumatoid arthritis, or RA, is an autoimmune and inflammatory disease, which means that your immune system attacks healthy cells in your body by mistake, causing inflammation (painful swelling) in the affected parts of the body.

1893 *Times* 24 Aug. 6/3 Rheumatoid arthritis, that new and euphonious term for the old rheumatic gout of our forefathers.

1999 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Floating Hospital for children receives us with open doors: mom, dad, and me. I assume there were blood tests, poking and prodding my small veins and my small but swollen left ankle. I wonder if that's when the fear started, when the fainting and tight chest clench overtook me. I wonder if they told my parents it was rheumatoid arthritis over the phone or in person. I wonder if the fluid they removed was significant or just drops down the drain. I wonder how many doses of Motrin soothed my immune response. I have vague memories and a phantom limp from the thought of such pain at three years old.

2014 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Senior year of high school, that same swell of the left ankle returned. I tried to get out of gym but had to run the mile regardless. Being eighteen, I had to see an adult rheumatologist. He was impressed with the isolation of the swelling, tied to that left ankle, sometimes my hands, sometimes my right knee. He implemented extreme measures: methotrexate and Bledsoe boot to isolate the ankle. I hobbled around campus, being called cripple for the first time. The boot a visible marker of a disabled body. People would ask *what happened?* I would say rheumatoid arthritis and see the confusion in their eyes. How could such a young body be so frail?

rib, cervical, n.  
/rib, 'sərvik(ə)l/

An extra rib that arises from the seventh cervical vertebra. It is located above the normal first rib. A cervical rib is present in only about 1 in 200 people. It may cause pinching of nearby nerves or arteries, in which case it sometimes is removed surgically.

2020 Johns Hopkins A small percentage of people with a cervical rib develop thoracic outlet syndrome. Many people with a cervical rib never know it, because the bone is often tiny and isn't noticed, even in X-rays.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* The radiologist confirmed that I did not have a cervical rib. But the tingling was still there, still present, still floating around my arm, shoulder, and fingers. Part of me wanted the extra bone, more excess, more marrow, more of me. If it was there, though, removal was the next step. And that would require bravery.

Ss

symptom, n.  
/'sɪmptəm/

A (bodily or mental) phenomenon, circumstance, or change of condition arising from and accompanying a disease or affection, and constituting an indication or evidence of it; a characteristic sign *of* some particular disease. Esp., in modern use, a subjective indication, perceptible to the patient, as opposed to an objective one or sign.

1869 S. Fenwick *Med. Diagnosis* i. 2 Diseases are distinguished from each other either by such alterations in the organs themselves, or their secretions, as can be ascertained by the senses of the observer (physical signs); or by changes in the functions of the parts affected (symptoms).

2019 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* There are five symptoms, one of which is a visible symptom. I pick at the bright blighted scabs on my scalp and wish they were the whole of my pain. Wish they could be the only proof needed. I keep my hair short so the dermatologists don't have to fuss with my curls too long, so their inspection is quick and precise. I don't trust dice, or cards, or the floating pain in my jaw that is neither dental nor neurological. I don't trust tea leaves, the pulpy truths the woman in purple tries to read. The four fallible symptoms unseen: I do not trust them. Their shape, their pathology unsteady like the broken garden path stones I tiptoe on with bare feet. The weight of me cracks them all crooked, larval ants wriggling, white, bright, real.

Tt

telehealth, n.

/'tel ə, heɪθ/

A system that uses internet and telecommunications technology to provide a wide range of healthcare services, as telemedicine, education, patient care management, and remote monitoring of vital signs.

2020 TeleHealth Services *The TeleHealth Difference* TeleHealth Services is dedicated to enhancing the hospital experience and raising the satisfaction of patients and staff. We have become the premier provider of integrated patient education and communication solutions for the healthcare market by offering our comprehensive approach and service-based strategy.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I tried to find one closer so I wouldn't have to trek on the train or drive with clutching hands into the parking garage – getting beeped at by angry cars, driving the wrong way to find a spot. When I found a new doctor, she was a colleague of the previous, studied in the ways of Tufts Medical Center, familiar nonchalant tone. After one initial visit, she vanished, pushing me back into Boston, back into the care of a man who is kind but inert. But now it should be easier; Telehealth Facetime Zoom calls, moving my phone camera to the spots where it's red and raised. They can't perform a remote biopsy. They can't perform remote blood tests. I'm removed from the care, removed from the conversation. I'm accessible to these faces, but skin needs hands to prove its topography.

test, v.  
/tɛst/

To subject to a test of any kind; to try, put to the proof; to ascertain the existence, genuineness, or quality of. to test out, to put (a theory, etc.) to a practical test.

1888 M. E. Braddon *Fatal Three* I. v. 98 I have tested the water in all the wells.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I can look at an app on my phone to see the test results: the inflammation, the vitamin deficiency or excess, the immune response. The numbers appear in red if they're bad, like markings on a failed exam. I've had teachers tell me they never grade in red, using green or purple instead. I test this theory out with my own students, leaving comments in pink or orange. They still feel the same lack I do. Them lacking the words, lacking commas, forgotten keystrokes betraying meaning. I wonder if the red is ever wrong. If my own blood was miscounted, how to I re-test? How do I make my blood better? Doctors test me whenever they shrug away my pain, letting it fall to the side like my jacket on the side of the waiting room chair. They test different medicines, bypassing FDA regulations and writing to insurance. They all fail. Break through symptoms and drug intolerance and roving pain from my head to my jaw to my eyes. I keep writing in pink, hoping for no red, no values outside the median.

trial, n.  
/'traɪ(ə)l/

1. The action of testing or putting to the proof the fitness, truth, strength, or other quality of anything; test, probation.
2. That which puts one to the test; *esp.* a painful test of one's endurance, patience, or faith; hence, affliction, trouble, misfortune.

1604 E. Grimeston tr. J. de Acosta *Nat. & Morall Hist. Indies* iv. vi. 221 The triall of mettall by fire.

1885 'Mrs. Alexander' *At Bay* ix. 137 Her life has been a very trying one... I trust its trials will soon be over.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Medication after medication, their efficacy only lasting a trial run. When the doctors ask me question after question, I worry my answers are not trusted. They try my patience, they dismiss the words of their patient, they pry while I cry and hope for an end. Trial by popping pills, by the self-injectable needle, by the four-hour infusion. When will the trying and the trials end? When will one medicine be enough? When does trial become trust? Become constant?

## Uu

ulcer, n.  
/'ʌlsər/

An erosive solution of continuity in any external or internal surface of the body, forming an open sore attended with a secretion of pus or other morbid matter.

1720 W. Gibson *Farriers New Guide* ii. lv. 249 A small Ulcer is more easily manag'd than one that is large.

2017 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* The doctors always swabbed for strep, told me not to share water bottles. I listened, tensed every ligament/joint/muscle in my face to hide the questions, the doubt that formed nodules in my brain. The doubt nodes, clumps of tissue like the ulcers I knew were just beyond the threshold of sight. The old medical light not enough to brighten the throated shadows. But Dr. MacDonald, with her numbing and cameras – she was able to see the hills straining to raise the flesh in my esophagus. My mom paid \$180 for magic mouth wash and steroid serums to soothe. Nothing could depress them: my colony of hidden throat hills. They burned with the swig of acidic drinks and ketchup seared hot going down. I only drank smoothies and ice cream and soup – submitting to the diet prescribed by the ulcers.



ultrasound, n.  
/'ʌltrə,saʊnd/

Imaging method that uses high-frequency sound waves to produce images of structures within your body. The images can provide valuable information for diagnosing and treating a variety of diseases and conditions.

2018 U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services *NIH* The team found a combination of genes that could make *E. coli* bacteria produce gas vesicles on their own. This combination of acoustic reporter genes resulted in gas-filled vesicles with the properties required for ultrasound tracking.

2004 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* Summer camp left me sweating in the backseat of our red Ford Tempo. I perched like a bird in the bathroom; a seven-year-old whose blood wanted out. The doctors prescribed thirty-two liters of water for the ultrasound, or maybe they wanted to drown the bacteria that hitchhiked on the undercooked burgers. But the water wanted out, too, only realizing after that it was an overdose. Not meant for a child. I felt the swell of it and kicked my feet at every pulse, every jab. When the cold jelly raised goosebumps on my torso, I tensed. Probing for an answer felt like a new disease.

Vv

vein, n.  
/veɪn/

Any of the relatively thin-walled blood vessels through which blood returns to the heart from the tissues.

1674 T. Traherne *Poems* (1966) 376 Veins, wherein Blood floweth, Refreshing all my flesh, Like Rivers.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* They never had a problem with the veins in my left arm. Sometimes juice or crackers were required to jumpstart the process. Sometimes they'd try the right when nerves made stagnant the flow. But this time: nothing. Repetition made the removal harder to come by. I cried. I called my mom on speaker and tried to laugh as they checked the left arm, the right arm, the right hand. Blue streaks hiding beneath. They'd pinch, I'd squint further into myself, wanting to induce the visual snow and near-fainting float of my head. Nothing. I was told to come back. Told it couldn't be done. Veins only giving way to the IV, not the vials that needed to be filled. My body was willing to take but not give. Maybe I should've listened.

Ww

wait, v.  
/weɪt/

To look forward (esp. with desire or apprehension) to (some future event or contingency); to continue in expectation of.

1830 Ld. Tennyson *Adeline* in *Poems* 71 What aileth thee? whom waitest thou?

2018 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* We sit in individual chairs and I itch the ER band on my left wrist while we wait. My mom gets me chocolate chip cookies to ignore the time with. The complaining woman gets priority; her loudness quickens the pace of nurses. Two hours and I'm placed next to the woman, a curtain letting through all her bicker and cries for a softer comb. Five hours and they get me mac and cheese for my aching throat. The IV drips and the stale ginger ale keeps me from tapping. My phone rings. The specialists are calling from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor clinic. They consider sending Infectious Disease. Seven hours of the numbing meds but I can still remember the pain; ready to recite all its activity, but they choose phone light over colposcope. They choose med student over diagnostic criteria. My patience a lesson for her pupil. Meanwhile that woman gets a shower for her tired body. Mine bends, but not far enough to mean anything.

worry, v.  
/'wɒri/

To cause distress of mind to; to afflict with mental trouble or agitation; to make anxious and ill at ease.

1822 W. Hazlitt *Table-talk* xxiii. (On great and little Things) Small pains are..more within our reach; we can fret and worry ourselves about them.

1861 J. G. Holland *Lessons in Life* xiii. 181 When she can find nothing to do, then she worries.

2021 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* It does nothing to worry. I try not to waste time on it, but they make it so easy. No time to be seen, no diagnosis. What if the pain remains? What if it migrates to parts of me they will never find? Just beyond reach? What if I can't walk? What if I have to drop out? What if the pain becomes too great? Spirals. Spirals. Center. Breathe. Hold the dragon close. Eat the mango popsicle, let it melt the pain. Sing loudly in the car. Get brunch with your friends. You can still eat, most of the time. You can still walk, most of the time. You can still write words on the page with pen or with keystrokes. Let the worry be a word and nothing more.

Xx

x-ray, n.  
/'ɛks, reɪ/

*Physics.* Electromagnetic radiation of high energy and very short wavelength (between about 0.01 and 10 nanometres), capable of passing through many substances opaque to light, and widely used in medical diagnosis and treatment and in many analytical techniques.

1899 T. C. Allbutt et al. *Syst. Med.* VI. 408 The application of the X rays to the diagnosis of internal aneurisms.

2014 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I hobble into the radiology reading room, black Bledsoe boot on my left leg; the doctor and his attending ready to receive me. He asks what I study, joking that Robert Frost is his uncle. With a nervous laugh, I remove my left sock. I bring it close to my face, putting fabric between me and the needle guided by his hands and the x-ray images. The puff of my ankle needs more fluid before it can get smaller. He injects the cortisone with a smile, a procedure he could sleep during. My entire body is birch bark – wanting to peel at the slightest prick.

Yy

young, adj.  
/jəŋ/

Of a living person or thing that has lived or existed for a relatively short time; that is in the early stage of life or growth; youthful; juvenile.

1719 I. Mather *Duty of Parents to pray for Children* 89 What Horrors of Soul, will perplex you, when young Sins and old Bones will meet, in your grievous and furious Reflections.

1821 W. Scott *Kenilworth* III. xvi. 347 Young in years but old in griefs.

2002 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* My eyes are allowed to roam; watching the blow of leaves, crusted paint oozing out of chloroplasts. My hands are allowed to tug at my uneven socks, the brace holding my ankle tight and polka-dotted fabric tighter. But my feet can't run, syncopated steps to lift the extra weight on my left side. I cut holes in my pants, hide under tables with scissors and chop the ends off my hair. Anything to have less of me. Less fabric. Less organic matter. The young in me cut off, suctioned out, extracted. My mom filled me with Philadelphia cheesecake, the sour strawberry filling. Or ham and cheese on pita.; anything to stop the wasting away. But I'm only growing in the wrong places. Watching Elmo tell Dorothy stories to settle the swell in my ankle.

Zz

zinc  
/zɪŋk/

A mineral that is essential to the body and is a constituent of many enzymes that permit chemical reactions to proceed at normal rates. Zinc is involved in the manufacture of protein (protein synthesis) and in cell division.

2020 *Arthritis Foundation* Studies show significantly lower zinc levels in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) compared to those without it. The lowest levels are associated with more severe disease. Researchers say zinc may help improve RA symptoms by supporting the immune system and cartilage.

2020 J. L. Chernoch *Afflictionary* I want to point out the structure: like a net, a barrier, something strong. Unlike me and the weak cartilage that attacks itself. Self-deprecating body in need of support. So, I take the large yellow pills, the dry chalk of it sticks in my throat, but I push it down. *This will help me.* The doctor mentions folic acid for my hair, zinc to strengthen those loose connections. I take them all: vitamin D, potassium, multiple multivitamins to cover me over with the atomic structures proven to hold me together unlike all the loose threads I seem to be.

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