

ultrasonic

moth muffled in acoustic armour
fuzz swaddled I wrap myself
in blankets:
every sound a fingernail
scraping spine pressing between
each vertebrae all too muchness
the physical pain of pitches:
pop songs, pedestrian crossings,
sirens, the kettle boiling

my whole face
tense, my shoulders
squint to my ears,
eyes screw tight because
sounds hurt worse in light.
The soft glow
of day through
navy blue curtains
an overbright screech.

some moths have no ears,
cannot hear.
others have tympanal
membranes so sensitive
they eavesdrop on
the ultrasonic conversation
of bats.

I cocoon and wish to emerge earless.

hush.

hush.

hush.

bird brain

\ we are made to do the things we're made for /
 \ rise up and up wing muscle pump /
 \ breathe in and breathe into /
 \ air sacs cushion fragile organs /
 \ fill full and /

\ sight fish /
 \ embrace gravity /
 \ fold wings /
 \ taut /

v|v

beak
breaks surface

potential
neck snap, dead
flotsam feathers
and flesh

the pressures are not
equal, I am unequal
to the pressure

to live is to harpoon
head through water

to live otherwise
would be cruel
though the fish
might not think so

dammit, gannet
exhilarate
again

northern flicker

A woodpecker's tongue curls all the way around its brain, cushioning soft matter. It drills into bark seeking bugs, hammers into soil for ants, drums on drainpipes for the heck of it. I found a flicker dead on the ground once, claws curled, freckled body rigid beneath a window it had struck with its pretty little head. The concussion killed her.

What is the difference between sleep and unconsciousness? I awake in decorticate posture every morning, stiff and hurting, my neck and head in too much pain to allow for movement. The body does its best.

There is no choice but patience. I left the bird for scavengers. Silent. Unruffled.

interlude: mammography

And back at the doctor's it's time for my annual pap smear, too. Do you check your breasts, she asks. No I admit. Well since you're here I'll show you how.

She palpates. It's uncomfortable. Press here, do you feel that?

I do. A hardness the size of a quarter at twelve. Another, smaller one at two o'clock.

The next available mammogram is over a month away. I will never be healthy again. How awful will chemo feel. Maybe it will be too far advanced. Will I need surgery. I have never had surgery before. Could I be allergic to general anesthetic or be one of those people who gets paralyzed but stays conscious. Holy shit don't even think that. Would they take both sides so I won't be lopsided. I hate my chest anyways. Is that why this is happening. Did I eat too much soy. Was it too many electronics in my bedroom, a computer because I needed it for homework, wanted it for Warcraft III. Was it because when I stopped training my body fat reinfested and I went from A-cup to C. Have I always been this vain. I confessed to my boyfriend that I hate my boobs and would keep them flat if I could and he was repulsed that I would even say that is it because I hated puberty and myself and wished for something to be wrong other than my head or because I gave up on my gratitude journal after three nights or I started adding milk to my tea or maybe tea itself or being on birth control since 18. Maybe the concussion is lasting because my body is cancered, something more serious is wrong is wrong is wrong and what do I eat not soy or red meat no dairy or coffee but leaf after leaf of lettuce and kale and vegan protein shakes and berries and oatmeal though I don't want to eat I don't want to nurture this faulty shell

They start with an ultrasound, because I'm young and they prefer not to do mammograms on young women because of the radiation.

Are you pregnant they ask, could you be pregnant, any chance you are pregnant.

Then they see what they see and send me on to the mammogram. I wait another hour, two. Cold in a gown.

Everyone speaks very softly dressed in pastels, walls pale pink it feels more like a spa than a medical centre.

They can't say anything about the scan, I need to wait for the results. The bus ride home takes an hour.

A few days later the doctor's clinic calls: the results are in.

I need to go get them in person, but I don't need an appointment, I can just wait for the doctor on call.

It's not my doctor. He says: I don't know you, I didn't do this exam, I know nothing about this. He hands me a letter. There's no cancer, he says. I don't know you.

He leaves. No cancer, and a letter. I read it and don't understand. I deflate.

I go home and read the letter again. I google fibrocystic. I'm tired and the words don't resolve. It's all foggy

I'm not a cancer patient and

tomorrow I have vestibular physio.

I never bring it up with a medical professional again.

I don't like to think about my breasts

Ultrasound because I'm young and they prefer not

They see what they see and I wait
softly, it feels medical. Or maybe
clinical

they can't say
I go to results

It's not my I don't know I didn't, he says. I don't know you.

deflated fibrocystic.
don't resolve. foggy

and tomorrow vestibular again.
A quarter at twelve. A nickel at two.

it will happen as it has happened
before: I hit my head again &
it's all over. It ended
the last time, too.

muscle tentacles bone
husks around joints
dehydrated

rigid

supraspinatus lift bridge
elevates scapulae
perpetual huh?

list left

lift left

awry architecture

(it does not balance)
(the ledger itself)
(a different poem)
(a different writer)
(a time)(a place)

the head injury semi-finals

it is not hard to make the playoffs but staying
after the long slog of eighty-two regular season games
playing (through)(with)(despite)(along)
well that's another story

you just need some old fashioned (tenacity)(resolve)(heroics)
bobby baun scored the winning goal on a broken leg after all
bare-headed boomer (my childhood idol)

we play for (the cup)(bragging rights)(love of the game)(something to do)
a real time litigation on twitter
that maybe you (malingerer)
(are faking it)
(should be better by now)
(just get over yourself)
(need to get back on the horse)
(have the fear)
(retire already)

no, gritty would never say that
our bug-eyed harbinger of revolution
I am the mascot of (mTBI)(concussion)(bird brain)(squidgy melon)

there are people hurt worse
but you miss one hundred percent of
so put yourself out there
play the man not the

let the (committee)(peanut gallery)(commentators) decide
if you're (qualified)(disabled)(enough)

Whet: to sharpen, to hone; as in to whet a knife

Whet: to increase in desire; as in to whet one's appetite

Wet: to moisten, not dry; as in to wet one's lips

wet blanket

soggy moggy

squidgy melon

drowned rat

whet language
sharpen, hone

whet a knife
whet appetite

whet pain
needle thin

whet wanting
a little whet

whet whittle
whet whit

whet spittle
whet wince

whet whim
whet whidding

left wanting
left whetting

the wounded deer

after Frida Kahlo

Pinned as St Sebastian
on his tree, arrow-flecked
no hart, she
thirsts for water
but cannot head to stream.
The hunters unseen
in pursuit still, or not,
drive her forward;
carma refuses stop.
Pierced side slick
and hot, muscles judder
but the barbs stick
beneath thick skin.
She is unsurprised,
you can see it by her half-lidded eyes.
She has been hunted before.
She looks over shoulder
mid-flight, bound for trees.

On the other side, unseen
and unheard by doubled ears
the wide road waits.

Rerun: shoulder to head, shoulder to head. Tilt-a-whirl nausea, clatter of skates, Danny's not here Mrs. Torrance. Sick ache, punk sick, lights and sounds and motion all a too-muchness. Ow, ow, ow. Change the channel, please. Mute this commercial break. Dammit, pass the remote here. The batteries must be dead, it's stuck.

my neck cracks:

a millipede crosses glass

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I dream I was at this poetry conference / instead
of panels there were workshops and roundtable
discussions / on the last day / Lyn Hejinian says
"Poets can't be stationary" / she invites the Red
Deer Belladonnas to play roller derby / I coach
the dream team of poets / turns out the most
interesting poets are also the best players

Claire Lacey is a multidisciplinary writer, performer, educator and critic. Claire's first book of poetry, *Twin Tongues*, won the 2013 Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry. A collaboration with artist Sachie Ogawa resulted in *Selkie*, a graphic novel which was successfully crowdfunded and published in 2019.

Currently, Claire lives in Aotearoa New Zealand and holds the University of Otago's City of Literature PhD scholarship. Their creative/critical thesis is on the subject of poetry and brain injury, and is jointly supervised by the departments of English and Anatomy. An essay based on this work is forthcoming in the anthology *Impact: Women Writing After Concussion* in September 2021.

