

I Dream a Cat

By Jane Newkirk

One in three Covid patients put on a ventilator experience extensive symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to research, which adds to mounting evidence of the virus's impact on mental health.

—The Guardian

It took my breath,
and when they forced breath
into me, it took the pleasure
from my mouth and all
the words that live there
went to sleep.

I teach my eyes to speak
the language of pain
and need.

It took my toes
clean off like a hatchet.
It took my standing up
like a man.

I live between walls,
behind windows
with blinds drawn. Beyond
is where my life used to be.

It took the memory
of the last woman I touched,
the feel of my hand on her,
unhurried to find
what it wants to say.

I don't know what day it is.
There are no seasons here,
only pale shadows
and a cold sun that never sets.

I think of a cat,
the way it sleeps

in the warm wedge of the sun.
I dream of sleeping like that.

Jane Newkirk has worked as a cook, bread baker, visual artist and art gallery owner. She works as an occupational therapist in a long-term acute care hospital in Jackson, Mississippi.

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