



A Present Absence

I don't go to the support group for people with chronic illness.
I don't tell this poem what chronic illness I have
because I have more than one, and I get tired of counting.
Today I thought about the blood and more blood,
and stopped counting the number of clots.
I have stopped chanting, *This is not my life*.
Instead, I chant mundane things like, *Buy Norwegian sweaters*.
Why is my mind an advertisement?
Why are all of my imaginary friends suddenly wearing Norwegian sweaters?

I don't go to the support group because I can't face their trauma.
I have enough of my own.
Sometimes knowing that others understand makes you feel better,
but I don't want people to understand.
I would rather go to a park and sit on a bench
and trace the leaves with magical crayons that grow out of my eyelashes.
I don't go to the support group for people with chronic illness
because everyone I interact with is already my support group,
even the irate customer at work because at least I am not stuck in bed,
at least their anger is not my blood.



April Penn writes about the dissolution of self, reality, and relationships. Her poetry has been published in *The Offing*, *The Fem*, *Maps for Teeth*, *Provocateur*, *Hoax Zine*, and *Amethyst Arsenic*. She has featured at the Cantab Poetry Lounge, Out of the Blue Gallery, Occupy Boston and UMASS Amherst. Along with poet Michael F. Gill, she is cofounder of the experimental writing group, The Brighton Word Factory.

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