

I CALL MYSELF BACK

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...every disease takes us in pieces in some way...cancer, ms, dementia, addiction, etc. they all systematically rob us of ourselves.

—Elizabeth Murphy

i call myself back from the pain from my horror from
my *susto* from all the moments i named myself
not normal sick diseased unable incapable desperate
despairing afraid crazed i call myself back from
nightmares from leg cramps from nausea from
forgetfulness from unconsciousness and self-
consciousness from waking fears from loss from
explanations i call myself back from the nights i did not
sleep from shed and unshed tears

i call us back from medication that hurts us as it helps
us from hospitals and pharmacies from doctors and
nurses from clinics and lab results from blood draws and
bandages from little books with cramped numbers i call
us back from chemotherapy and radiation from dizziness
from neuropathy from side effects from exhaustion
i call us back from trembling limbs from more
prescriptions and more injections from everything that
removes us from natural medicine

but i will begin at the beginning reclamation begins at
every point i call myself back from the child i was always
alone afraid to be abandoned unable to sleep i call myself
back from the child who was told she was ugly for her
dark skin and her round features i will remember her as a
child filled with the joy of running child on a swing child
on the roof gazing at the sky and dreaming

i call us back from all our hurts here we all are in our
own pain our fear our shame our guilt our anger i call us
back from everything that has taken us i call it all back
our lands our names our tongues our histories our stories
our gods our rivers our mountains our sacred places our
skies our stars i call us back from everything that
rendered us alien every time we were told we did not
belong every time we were despised i call us back from
poverty and violence i take us back from malnutrition and
mis-education from war and from addiction i call us back
from silence and separation i call us back

we will not be robbed of ourselves not by disease not
by history not by the bureaucracies of healthcare systems
or governments not by doctors who never listen not by a
socioeconomic order which prizes cultural erasure not by
drug companies who do not believe our pockets are finite
not by the capitalist system that extracts our labor until it
abandons us like broken machinery we call ourselves
back we call ourselves back

we have walked through fire through burning infernos
we have wept we have suffered
we call ourselves back we have survived we have
become stronger we call ourselves back we have not lost
any part of ourselves we are not diminished we call
ourselves back
we are whole