

Breathe.

It's as easy as breathing, they'll tell you. An automatic bodily function.

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*(You recall the body as beginning and ending; the loop in perpetuum. Birth and death and rebirth in hospital off-white, lit by unholy blue LED buzz. God tunneled into black and white. You cry.)*

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It will be the first day outside, regular streets, non-essential doctor's visit, in 402 days. You counted. 402 days home, facing those hallowed walls, hands clasped in-lap, counting down days to the masses semi-safe(r) and pinpricked and immune.

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You stare out the window, mask in-hand, grip a tight squeeze. It's not about the mask; you'll do anything to protect others. It's about them protecting you. They won't. They haven't. Your existence outside in the public is a threat. Each person, a warning. You do not and cannot know if they carry the virus that killed so many you loved, and will undoubtedly kill you, you with your [disabled] body, your inability to be treated.

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*(Antibiotics curl the body inward. You spit poison when you cry. Lifesaving medicine a life's ender. Your allergies beyond nut, egg, milk. Your body has been at war since pre-birth; mother's curse to need assistance to life—six fetuses, each named alphabetic. You were "A," became "G"—seventh. Alone. You have died. Your organs swollen, near-balloon burst. You have become paralyzed. Lost the way to walk, speak, think. Your heart has stilled, rebooted, thrice. Every virus, every disease, caught within your immunocompromised body.)*

Immunocompromised—a word you always misspell.

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You would not exist if your parents weren't in the medical industry. Death along knife's edge at four, six, fourteen. Your existence: miracle.

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402 nights imagining a sterile death once more, once again. Intubated beep. Heart monitored race. Body still. Still. Still.

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It has never been such a challenge to go outside. You've had to fear for your life before—you, woman, Latina. Streets unsafe for you, yes. But you've never seen a disease pull apart your family like blood-orange peels; the bitter, bloodied pith. You've lost so many.

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It has never been so hard to be outside, inside, *alive*.

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You stare at the door. The handle. You exhale through the mask, inhale. You taste your bittered, anxious, asthmatic breath, the fear on your tongue. The buildup of bile, of pain. To be [disabled] is to exist with addition: eyes along your back, your sides. The reach for hand sanitizer. The fearful shower. Everyone a potential carrier. Your existence: risky.

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To be medically, invisibly [disabled] is to be Icarus; the Sun the [abled] world, the existence all others live. Your wax wings will melt in one wrong flight, so you stay grounded. Stay safe.

A pandemic upends your family, your life, your future.

You.

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To exist outside is to risk your life. 402 days. Seven familial deaths. Two vaccines. One life.

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You exit home, mask on, and feel the Sun on your skin. Your wings. Your face.

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The panic remains. You are not sure if you will ever feel safe again.

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Still, you walk.

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You breathe.