Trauma Survey

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Artist's Statement

This poem draws on my background as an emergency room nurse, where one is called to care for patients with a variety of illness presentations. My intent in the poem is to compare psychosomatic illness to other presentations seen in the emergency room, specifically to traumatic physical injuries. One of the interesting things about trauma care is how protocolized it is; how during a trauma survey, each part of the body is named out loud to the room alongside findings and a plan is formulated as a team accordingly. This transparency, this naming of things, this directness feels at odds with how we often feel uncomfortable approaching conversations around psychosomatic illness, which can be just as devastating and just as complicated.

Trauma Survey

Today, it came as a seizure
Cracking with energy, writhing in refusal
And finally sputtered to a stall and a sigh
An arched back thrust into the air

Last month, a betrayal of senses
Pins on the forehead and slow, stilted speech
Fallen limbs too heavy to carry
A midline split in half

We speak in codes and circles and hopeful referrals
But the truth is, emotion evades reason
Pouring out in fits and starts unnamed

The truth is, this trauma was non-accidental
A consequence of unchosen upbringing
Or a byproduct of just being

But to attempt some recovery
The injuries need accounting

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